

**Tuesday
10 June 2025**

**Volume 768
No. 149**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 10 June 2025

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

ROYAL ALBERT HALL BILL [LORDS]

Second Reading opposed and deferred until Tuesday 17 June (Standing Order No. 20).

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

The Secretary of State was asked—

Track-2 Acorn Cluster

1. **Seamus Logan** (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): What progress his Department has made on advancing the Track-2 Acorn cluster. [904502]

The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. We have always been clear that we support the Acorn project. My colleagues and I have had many discussions with the industry, and we know what an important proposal it is. As we have said, the decision is a matter for the spending review, but we are close to having those decisions. I thank the hon. Member for speaking up on behalf of the Acorn project, as many hon. Members across the House have done.

Seamus Logan: Many happy returns, Mr Speaker. Proposals for carbon capture and storage near Peterhead in my constituency have been kicked into the long grass by successive UK Governments. Last week, a report by Professor Paul de Leeuw of Robert Gordon University warned of the need for urgent action to protect the energy supply chain and accelerate the just transition; he warned that thousands upon thousands of jobs were at risk. While I know the Secretary of State recognises that the Acorn project is a strategic cornerstone of the transition to a low-carbon future and economic growth in the north-east of Scotland and the nation, will the Government finally commit the funding necessary for the project to proceed?

Sarah Jones: We know how important carbon capture, usage and storage is—the Climate Change Committee said there is no route to net zero that does not include carbon capture—with, of course, up to 50,000 good, well-paid jobs across the UK. The Government have already shown their commitment to carbon capture

with a £21.7 billion investment. I am afraid that the hon. Member will have to wait until the spending review for the final decisions, but I hope he agrees that we are putting in place ambitious, substantial carbon capture plans that will drive growth across the country.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): Acorn would go some way to reindustrialising areas of Scotland, which is much needed. I welcomed the Government committing £200 million from the national wealth fund for future industry at Grangemouth in my constituency. To avoid us again being in the precarious position of having private-capital or foreign-Government ownership dictate our future energy industries, do the Government plan to take any ownership stake in the industries that will be coming at Grangemouth?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right to say that we lost thousands of jobs under the previous Government, whether in ceramics, chemicals or steel. The previous Government saw foundational industries through the rear-view mirror, but we know that these industries will forge our future. That is why we are rushing to get to clean energy by 2030 so that we can bring prices down, why we are supporting our industries through the supercharger, and why through the industrial strategy we are looking to provide more support, not less, to those crucial foundational industries.

Fossil Fuels

2. **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): What steps he is taking to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. [904503]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. We have been busy since we last met for oral questions. We have confirmed that rooftop solar panels will be standard on all new build homes and have funded £650 million of clean energy upgrades for over 200 buildings. We have also delivered the first solar projects for 11 schools, secured Royal Assent for Great British Energy—the UK's first national publicly owned energy company in 70 years—launched the marine energy taskforce, signed a green industrial partnership with Norway and kick-started community energy right across the country. We are ambitious in our plans. There is much more to do, but we are doing more than any other Government to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

Tim Farron: Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Most of the 1,500 farms in Westmorland and Lonsdale have rivers or becks running through them. Since we are the most beautiful—and indeed wettest—place in England, that is an awful lot of potential, and mostly untapped, energy. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister meet me and hydro energy experts to consider a new nationwide project to support farmers to have small hydroelectricity schemes on their farms to diversify farm income, provide clean energy for the farm and harness natural renewable energy for the wider economy?

Michael Shanks: I will not be drawn on confirming whether the hon. Gentleman's constituency is the most beautiful part of England—I will leave that to him.

However, what he proposes sounds like a fantastic idea and I am happy to meet him to discuss it further. We see huge potential for a whole range of renewables. Those kinds of innovative projects—smaller scale as well—are what could deliver not just benefits for the system but real benefits for the communities that host them.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Moving from gas to electricity in home heating is an important part of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. Yet at the Select Committee hearing last week, we heard real concerns that people in energy debt are unable to disconnect from gas and are therefore still stuck paying standing charges. Will the Minister say what the Government's plans are to remove that problem and ensure that more people can take up the opportunities presented by electrifying home heat?

Michael Shanks: My hon. Friend makes two important points. First, on the importance of decarbonising heating across the country, the electrification of home heat will be an important way of delivering cheaper bills for people and reaching our decarbonisation targets. Secondly, on the important matter of debt, I know the Minister for Energy Consumers has been doing work with Ofgem, and we have been looking at a debt relief scheme for exactly those sorts of questions. Clearly, we want to support as many households as possible to move on to cheaper heating in the long term. We will continue to push forward that work.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Change in the language by the UK Government on the Moroccan autonomy plan paves the way for a bright new future between the two kingdoms. Does the Minister therefore feel that the time is right to finally make a decision on the UK-Morocco power project that could potentially add 8% of the UK's grid requirements and clean energy for the future?

Michael Shanks: The right hon. Gentleman and I have discussed this in the House before. He is right to point out that we see an important partnership with Morocco across our economy, and we have outlined more of that in the last few days. The proposal he discusses is from a private company and, like the previous Government, we have been looking at it. We will say more in due course.

Chris Kane (Stirling and Strathallan) (Lab): A very happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. Given the enormous potential for renewable energy generation across Scotland, including in my constituency, does the Minister recognise that accelerating community-owned energy projects and, crucially, improving local transmission infrastructure would not only reduce fossil fuel reliance, but deliver direct economic benefits to local people?

Michael Shanks: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, representing, as he does, a beautiful part of Scotland and one with huge potential for such schemes. That is why Great British Energy announced £4 million of funding for community energy projects in Scotland, working with the Scottish Government to drive those forward. We see, as my hon. Friend rightly points out,

the huge benefits not just of delivering clean power, but of the social and economic value for the communities that host it. We are clear that community-owned energy has huge untapped potential and huge benefits for communities. We want to see much more of it, and Great British Energy will help deliver it.

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response on reducing the reliance on fossil fuels; no more backing for oil and gas is essential for protecting our children's futures. However, that positive change requires a plan to future-proof British industries that works for everyone, particularly those who are currently working in those high-carbon sectors. Will the Minister and his colleagues commit to publishing an energy jobs plan for how those workers can be supported in that transition, particularly around being provided with retraining opportunities?

Michael Shanks: We consulted on a detailed plan around the future of energy in the North sea, which includes a detailed section on workforce planning. I am sure the hon. Lady was able to submit a response to that consultation, and we will look carefully at her views. We take the question of workforce incredibly seriously. Jobs will be created right across the clean power mission, including in the biggest upgrade to the transmission infrastructure that we have seen in this country for many years, much of which her party seems to oppose.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Today's brilliant announcement backing Rolls-Royce to deliver small modular reactors creates more skilled jobs while also delivering clean, secure energy that does not rely on fossil fuels, even when the sun does not shine and the wind does not blow. Does the Minister agree that the decision shows British business, supported by this Government, again leading the way?

Michael Shanks: My hon. Friend will not be surprised that I completely agree with her. Today, we have announced a new golden age of nuclear power in this country after decades of dither and delay; in fact, I think that the last switch-on of a nuclear power station was before I was even born. *[Interruption.]* It is not that long ago. We are driving forward the real potential that we see in nuclear power, and the Secretary of State will make a statement on that later. That is how we deliver thousands of well-paid, skilled jobs across the country and the important energy security that we need. I hope that we will see SMRs in every part of the United Kingdom, including in Scotland.

Rooftop Solar Power

3. **Lee Barron** (Corby and East Northamptonshire) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support rooftop solar power projects. [904504]

8. **Dr Allison Gardner** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support rooftop solar power projects. [904510]

15. **Mr Connor Rand** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support rooftop solar power projects. [904518]

21. **Tristan Osborne** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support rooftop solar power projects. [904525]

22. **Lee Pitcher** (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support rooftop solar power projects. [904526]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. You look younger every year, if I may say so. Last week, we launched the new future homes standard, which will ensure that the vast majority of new build houses will have solar panels installed as standard. This will end the absurd situation the previous Government left where new housing was built without solar panels. We are kick-starting a solar rooftop revolution, and the upcoming solar road map will lay out how we are bringing cheap clean power to families and businesses across the country.

Lee Barron: Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Only 20% of schools currently have solar panels. Brigstock Latham's primary in my constituency does not. That is why its year 5 pupils have written to me asking for panels on their roof. They tell me that this would cut their carbon footprint, reduce bills and help improve their education. One pupil wrote:

"We may be a small school, but we can be big sometimes."

Will my right hon. Friend support their inspiring campaign and perhaps visit these young community activists in my constituency?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate the pupils of Brigstock Latham's primary school on their incredible spirit. Young people right across the country care about these issues. Also, they are pointing out something really important, which is that we have this free resource of the sun and we should use it. That is why putting solar panels on schools and elsewhere is big project for Great British Energy.

Dr Gardner: Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. In my Stoke-on-Trent South constituency, businesses such as the Bestway Group, which owns Well healthcare in Meir Park, and Goodwin International in Newstead are keen to invest in rooftop solar, but they cannot get national grid connectivity. In the case of Well healthcare, it will have to wait until 2032. Meanwhile, residents in my village areas are frustrated at the growth of solar farms on agricultural land when there are acres of empty flat roofs on industrial estates. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the many challenges and opportunities for transitioning to clean energy that businesses in my constituency face?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises some important points. The first is on grid connections. With the grid reforms that we are doing, we are going to end this zombie queue where projects are taking up space when they are not going to connect or not going to connect in time. That will open up the future to projects such as hers. On the point about industrial estates, I can give her a sneak preview and tell her that this is part of the solar road map. She makes important points, and the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks) has volunteered to meet her.

Mr Rand: Thanks to Great British Energy, Meadow health centre in my constituency is set to have solar panels installed, which will cover its entire energy bills for the summer. My local hospital, Wythenshawe, will also benefit, saving my local NHS trust some £4 million to £5 million a year, which can be reinvested back into frontline services. Despite the doom-mongering on net zero that we hear from the Opposition Benches, does the Secretary of State agree that this shows the power of helping our public services and creating jobs?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having hit the jackpot with the NHS benefiting from what Great British Energy is doing. He makes such an important point here, which is that the net zero agenda is about lower bills. For example, it is about cutting energy bills for frontline services and putting the money back into those services. Who could possibly be against that?

Tristan Osborne: Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. In my Chatham and Aylesford constituency, Clarion Housing is working with Octopus Energy in Snodland to install roof solar panels and heat pumps in social housing units. Can the Minister confirm how we can expand on such schemes, using the tenant power tariff for example, to reduce energy costs for our most vulnerable constituents?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend makes a really important point, and this is something that we are working on. There is huge potential in working with energy companies, with social housing providers and others to find ways in which this can be a true part of an anti-poverty strategy. This is something that we are working on, and we will have more to say about in the weeks and months ahead.

Lee Pitcher: I wish you a very happy birthday, Mr Speaker. I welcome the news that one of Great British Energy's first major projects will be to install solar panels on schools and hospitals, and I hope that some of the 43 schools in Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme will benefit. I have heard from local sports clubs that are keen to be part of the green energy revolution but face installation and funding barriers. Will the Secretary of State consider extending Great British Energy and other schemes to help community sports facilities to go green?

Ed Miliband: I love my hon. Friend's idea; it is such a good one. Local sports clubs and lots of other community organisations can benefit from that project. I will suggest the idea to Great British Energy.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Mr Speaker, *The Times* has told the world how old you are today.

Mr Speaker: They got it wrong!

Sir Roger Gale: I do not propose to write it into the record, but I note that you are catching up on me. [*Laughter.*] Happy birthday.

Mr Speaker: Let us move on.

Sir Roger Gale: Yesterday, a Minister said from the Dispatch Box that only 1% of farmland was being damaged by development, yet solar panels are smothering

east Kent's best farmland. It must stop. Given what the Secretary of State has said, what further steps will he take to protect our farmland and really do move solar panels on to rooftops, car parks and public buildings?

Ed Miliband: There are a few questions in there, and I will try to answer them as briefly as I can. Even for the biggest solar ambitions, less than 1% of land would be covered. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need solar rooftops too. That is why we have put an end to years of dither and delay, and last week announced that new homes will have solar panels fitted as standard. It makes total sense.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The solar panels on my roof started working last week, and I am very excited. If you do not have any solar panels, Mr Speaker, maybe you could give yourself a birthday present and ensure that you have an array, too. Mine were made possible by the Solar Together scheme organised by Bath and North East Somerset council. Such schemes are so important to encourage people to install solar panels on their roofs. Will the Secretary of State ensure that funding for those schemes will continue?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate the hon. Lady on having taken that step. She makes an important point: lots of people want to do this, but there is an up-front cost barrier. One thing that my Department is doing is working with the private sector, social housing providers, as I have said, and others to ask how we might break down up-front cost barriers so that more people, particularly those who cannot necessarily afford those costs, can benefit from solar power and cheaper bills.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): Grand Union Community Energy in my constituency is a non-profit community group that has done excellent work in Kings Langley to raise funding to install solar panels on the roofs of local schools, developments and car parks. It also educates local residents on how they can utilise community energy to reduce energy bills, which we have all seen rise under this Government. What steps are being taken across Government to ensure that community projects such as Grand Union Community Energy are implemented more widely?

Ed Miliband: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his excellent question. I 100% agree with him about the role of community energy providers. I hope that he can persuade his Front Benchers to convert to supporting Great British Energy, because one of things that it will do—we will be happy to work with him on this—is unleash a wave of community energy across our country, doing precisely the things that he talks about.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I am delighted that the Government have seen the light on solar photovoltaics and recognised what an important step they are on the path to the sunlit uplands of homes that are genuinely fit for the future. Does the Secretary of State recognise that energy efficiency is a crucial part of energy security, and will he meet me to discuss how the future homes standard might ensure that every home is truly fit for the future, including by being zero carbon?

Ed Miliband: Let me first wish the hon. Member luck on her leadership bid. Anyone who wants to be a leader of a political party should take the idea under advisement, in my experience. I see the former Liberal Democrat leader, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), nodding. We want the future homes standard to really work. It was a plan that the previous Labour Government had for 2016, but the Conservative Government got rid of it. We want it to make a real difference, and it makes financial sense, because it means that we do not have to retrofit homes at much greater cost.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): I wish you a very happy birthday, Mr Speaker—your 40th, I am guessing. I was really impressed that Holy Trinity church in Colden Common, which is a heritage building, managed to increase its energy efficiency rating from F to A. Can the Secretary of State give any advice or guidance to communities who wish to improve heritage buildings, listed buildings and other old properties, which often face planning issues when seeking to install solar panels or insulation, or take other energy efficiency measures?

Ed Miliband: Let me congratulate the hon. Member's community group. This whole set of questions has shown the huge untapped potential in the constituencies of Members in all parts of the House. I will say two things in answer. First, I will take this back to GB Energy, because I think the role of community groups as potential partners is really important. Secondly, he makes an important point on planning guidance. Sometimes the planning rules are okay, but the guidance is the problem, and it creates bureaucratic hurdles. I am working with the Minister for Housing and Planning to make sure the guidance is clear to local councils where there are barriers that they should not be putting in the way.

Grid Capacity

4. **Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD):** What steps he is taking to increase grid capacity. [904506]

13. **Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD):** What steps he is taking to increase grid capacity [904516]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Increasing grid capacity is critical. We are halving the development time for new transmission infrastructure through reforms to planning and supply chains, so that we can deliver the grid capacity needed to achieve clean power by 2030 and meet the doubling of electricity demand by 2050.

Sarah Green: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know that some projects are waiting up to 15 years to connect to the grid, and the Secretary of State earlier referred to the zombie waiting list. Could I push him further and ask precisely what concrete steps the Department is taking to drastically cut that waiting list?

Michael Shanks: We have outlined significant reforms to the connections queue. There is currently more than 740 GW in that connection queue. Clearly, that is an unsustainable amount of demand for connection to the

grid, and most of it does not really exist, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out. We have put forward significant reforms, so that we prioritise projects that are ready to connect to the grid, and have strategic importance to the grid. The clean power action plan will drive forward what those strategic outcomes are. That work is under way, and the National Energy System Operator is considering those proposals. It will free up a huge number of projects from the connections queue, allowing new projects to join, and, crucially, allowing for demand projects that will help deliver economic growth.

Olly Glover: In my Oxfordshire constituency of Didcot and Wantage, sites at Culham, Harwell campus and Milton Park host a growing range of scientific and high-tech businesses, including a proposed artificial intelligence growth zone at Culham. Major housing growth also continues, and the new Valley Park development will use air source heat pumps. However, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership has raised concerns that grid constraints are causing significant delays to decarbonisation activities and creation of local power grids. What steps will the Minister take to address these problems and create an electricity grid fit for 21st-century Oxfordshire?

Michael Shanks: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point that outlines why this work is so important. There are two parts to it. The connections reform is crucial, so that we have a queue of projects that are strategically relevant and ready to be delivered. The second part is that we have to build significantly more grid infrastructure, and it is incumbent on all Members of this House to not oppose that grid infrastructure and then come here and say that they want new demand projects to be able to connect. Instead, they need to take a practical approach and say, “We’re going to have to build some new grid in this country if we want to unlock the huge potential of AI growth zones and other demand projects in the economy.”

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): The strategic defence reviews of this Government and the previous Government highlighted the risks posed to our security by climate change. Does the Minister agree that the increasing opposition by the Conservatives and other Opposition Members to clean power infrastructure and increasing our grid capacity across the country is not just economically illiterate but a risk to our national security?

Michael Shanks: As so often, my hon. Friend is correct on these matters. He usually has a quote that shows that, just a few months ago, Opposition Front Benchers agreed with us on many of these matters, but have suddenly changed their position. As my hon. Friend says, our proposals are not only critical to delivering energy security in an increasingly uncertain world, but to tackling the climate crisis, which has such an impact on our lives now and in the future, and to the economic opportunities of the 21st century.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. We need to ensure that the technology that we import to increase grid capacity is secure. US officials recently found kill switches in Chinese-made components

for solar farms. The Conservatives have been clear about the security risks that China poses in our energy supply chain, so will the Secretary of State confirm whether he discussed that issue in his recent meeting with Chinese officials? If not, why not?

Michael Shanks: On a day when we are announcing new nuclear schemes, I am almost tempted to ask: which party brought Chinese investment into the heart of our nuclear infrastructure? The Conservative party. In every decision taken about the energy sector and more widely, if there are questions about national security, they are taken forward in the usual way. We invest hugely in ensuring that all our critical national infrastructure is safe and secure from cyber-threats and other threats. That work continues and is a top priority for the Government. We are building the clean power system that delivers energy security, and the Conservatives are opposing it.

Clean Power Industries: Jobs

5. **Becky Gittins (Clwyd East) (Lab):** What estimate he has made of the number of additional jobs in clean power industries since July 2024. [904507]

The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones): Since the election, over £40 billion of investment has been announced in clean energy, creating good jobs with good wages, and by 2030, the industry could support hundreds of thousands of new jobs. We will soon publish our clean energy workforce strategy, which will set out in more detail where and how we will deliver the jobs of the future. The risk of voting for the Conservatives or Reform is that they would put all those jobs in jeopardy.

Becky Gittins: The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero’s clean power action plan is accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources and creating quality jobs in areas like mine in north Wales. A major expansion at the port of Mostyn will create 300 new jobs, as it prepares to increase its support for the offshore wind farm sector. Does the Minister agree that this is not the time to hold back, and that we should invest in green energy to tackle climate change, secure our energy supply and provide skilled jobs for my constituents in Clwyd East?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that speech—*[Interruption.]* I mean, for that beautiful short question. I welcome the jobs that are coming to the port of Mostyn. This Labour Government are driving investment in our communities from carbon capture, hydrogen, nuclear, wind and solar energy. Opposition Members have to explain to the British people why they want to leave them colder, poorer, in the pockets of dictators and with less good jobs.

Graham Leadbitter (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): I hear that it is your birthday, Mr Speaker. Congratulations! The UK Government have announced £14 billion for new, extremely expensive nuclear energy projects, while crucial shovel-ready green developments in Scotland are receiving nothing at all. Both Cruachan 2 and the Acorn project are awaiting the Minister’s approval to create new green jobs in Scotland. When will that money be made available?

Sarah Jones: When we hear the SNP opposing jobs, it seems sad for the people of Scotland. We are supporting jobs up and down Scotland. The hon. Gentleman does not have long to wait to hear about Acorn, because the spending review will be published later this week.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker, and very many happy returns. We obviously welcome new jobs when they are created, but will the Minister acknowledge the destructive impact of her Government's policies on jobs in oil and gas in the North sea? On Friday evening in Westhill, in my constituency, I met many workers who are terrified for their future, their family and their community, because the skilled jobs in the supply chain that is maintained by oil and gas are not being replaced at the pace needed by renewables. That is due to a slowdown in offshore wind deployment and a steep decline in oil and gas activity. Will she not admit that the Government have got this dreadfully wrong?

Sarah Jones: Under the previous Government, we lost 70,000 jobs in the oil and gas industry and more than 1,000 jobs in the ceramics industry. We produced only 30% of the steel that we need in this country, and the chemicals industry fell by 30%. The Conservatives' record is shocking. We are putting together a plan that will ensure we can transition a lot of people from oil and gas to renewables; as the hon. Gentleman knows, the skills are very similar. We are trying to make that easier through our passport system. We are developing a workforce plan, which we will publish in due course, that will involve hundreds of thousands of jobs. Why do Conservative Members oppose that?

Andrew Bowie: There has been no contrition, or acknowledgement of the people losing their jobs today in this country as a direct result of the Government's destructive policies. Some 3,000 jobs were lost in July 2024. Robert Gordon University estimates that there are 400 job losses every two weeks. Offshore Energies UK predicts that there will be 42,000 job losses unless there is significant policy change. The Just Transition Commission warns that 120,000 jobs may go by 2030, and that there is no prospect of a just transition, because the supply chain is just upping sticks and moving overseas. Will the Minister not acknowledge that this is the wrong course to take? Will she at least apologise to the men and women losing their jobs today?

Sarah Jones: The North sea will continue to play an important role for years to come, which is why we are keeping existing fields open for their lifetime. This is a declining base, and the hon. Gentleman knows that. This is not where the jobs of the future will be. They will be in the clean energy transition, which we are investing in at pace; there have been huge announcements today on nuclear, and there are the spending review announcements to come. We are investing in the jobs of the future; he is stuck in the past.

Warm Home Discount: Extension

6. **Mrs Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of extending the warm home discount to all households in receipt of means-tested benefits on people receiving those benefits. [904508]

16. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of extending the warm home discount to all households in receipt of means-tested benefits on people receiving those benefits. [904519]

20. **Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of extending the warm home discount to all households in receipt of means-tested benefits on people receiving those benefits. [904524]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. We are extending the warm home discount to more than 6 million households, doubling the number of families that will get support this winter. That is the difference that a Labour Government make. We are providing support for those who need it while we sprint to clean power by 2030, so that we can get off the energy rollercoaster and bear down on bills for good.

Mrs Brackenridge: A very happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the extension of the warm home discount to all households on means-tested benefits from this winter. Many low-income households were excluded because their homes were not classed as having a high cost to heat. In Wolverhampton North East, only 18% of households benefited from the discount in 2023-24. Can the Minister confirm that the new scheme is simple, fair and focused on those who are most in need?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that really important point. I can confirm that we will remove the hard-to-heat criterion, which means that support will go to low-income households that we know need help with their energy bills.

Nesil Caliskan: I thank the Minister for outlining the support available to households with high energy bills. Some 6,000 households in my constituency benefit from the warm home discount, but many in Barking and Dagenham, alongside almost 2 million other households in this country, are dealing with high energy debt. What plans are under way for energy debt relief schemes, or a scheme to help those who built up debt under the previous Government, so that we can support them now? Unlike the Conservatives, we do not abandon those households suffering from debt that arose as a result of the legacy of past Governments.

Miatta Fahnbulleh: We are working with Ofgem to put in place a debt support scheme to deal with the huge rise in energy debt that we saw during the energy crisis, which the Conservatives failed to deal with. That will provide much-needed support, whether through debt write-offs or debt repayment plans. It will mean that households that cannot afford their energy bills, are struggling, and will never pay that debt are provided with support.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. The Government are targeting measures based on people's income, but will they look at the issue of rural homes? Many thousands of people live in poorly insulated homes in isolated areas; families there are left in the cold in the winter.

Miatta Fahnbulleh: We know there are parts of the country where homes are not up to standard and families are struggling with bills. That is why our warm homes plan is so important. We will target homes across the country and ensure that we provide a range of measures, from insulation through to solar and heat pumps, so we can ensure that homes are warmer and cheaper to run.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker! Like me, you don't count the years; you make the years count. You are doing very well at that.

I welcome the Minister's answer. She has in the past been keen to ensure that Northern Ireland does not lose out on schemes. Yesterday, the decision on the winter fuel payment was announced to the House, which we all welcome. The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Swansea West (Torsten Bell), was clear that the legislation starts here, but help for Northern Ireland will come from here as well. Will there be the same help for those in Northern Ireland, who need it as much as people here?

Miatta Fahnbulleh: We are working across all nations to ensure that households get the support that they need. I will be in Northern Ireland next week, where I will talk to the devolved Administration about how we can work together to ensure that homes across the country are supported.

Decoupling Electricity and Gas Prices

7. **Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to decouple electricity and gas prices. [904509]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Accelerating the clean energy transition away from insecure and expensive fossil fuels towards cheap, clean renewables and nuclear power will help decouple gas and electricity prices. As a result, we will reduce the exposure of consumer bills to volatile international crises and ensure that we never again face the kind of cost of living crisis that the last Government presided over.

Edward Morello: New solar is 11% cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil fuel, and onshore wind is 39% cheaper, yet the marginal pricing system that ties electricity costs to the market price of gas has resulted in British consumers enduring the fourth-highest global energy prices during a cost of living crisis. Does the Minister agree that decoupling electricity prices from the gas market is essential if consumers are to enjoy lower-cost energy?

Michael Shanks: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his expertise in this area, which he often brings to the House. He is absolutely right that decoupling from volatile and expensive gas prices is critical, and the journey we are on to develop clean power by 2030 will do that. Our objective is to deliver a clean power system where gas only provides the back-up, rather than setting the price, as it currently does. Too often—80% of the time—we rely on gas to set the price. We are trying to remove that, and to build a clean power system for the future.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): I think we all agree that it is important for us to protect all consumers from the volatile oil and gas prices that my hon. Friend has mentioned. However, while we shift and undertake that reform, has the Minister considered the benefits of having an energy social tariff, to protect customers now from those volatile oil and gas prices, and to prepare them for a cleaner, better and reformed energy market in the future?

Michael Shanks: I always agree with my hon. Friend, but on her initial point, I probably do not. I am not sure that we do all agree in this House that we should remove the volatility of fossil fuel prices. Some want us to remain linked to fossil fuels for longer and longer. We are determined to remove that vulnerability from people's bills, so that we do not face the price spikes that many families still struggle with. She is right to point to targeted support as well. We are looking at social tariffs. Part of the challenge is that the phrase means different things to different people, but we are clear that bringing down bills for everyone is a top priority for this Government, and the clean power mission is how we will do it.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. The Energy Secretary has said that there is a "principled case" for removing green taxes from electricity bills, and the cost being met by increases in green taxes on gas bills. That would be a net tax rise for every household—80% of the country—that uses gas. This was not an argument that he made before the election, so can the Minister take this opportunity to rule out any increase in taxes, charges or levies on gas bills?

Michael Shanks: On the Government Benches, we are trying to cut people's bills as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman was a core part of a Government who failed to do that for many years. I am surprised that he did not rise to congratulate Great British Energy on its investment in solar panels on schools and hospitals, because his constituents are benefiting from one on a hospital and one on a school. He should welcome that.

Nick Timothy: If the hon. Member wants to talk about my constituency, he can talk about the betrayal of the Sunnica application, which is being imposed on my constituency by the Energy Secretary. The public will see that the answer was not a "no" from the Minister. Families across the country should be worried; this is becoming a pattern. For weeks, I asked Ministers about their plan to align with the European carbon price. For weeks, they denied that it would happen, and then, once the local elections were done, they did it, increasing electricity bills by stealth for every family and business in the country. Now it is the same for gas bills. When will the Minister be straight with people and admit that the Government are adding to the bills of families and businesses, not cutting them?

Michael Shanks: The House will have heard the shadow Minister's failure to welcome solar panels on a hospital and a school in his constituency, but he can deal with his own constituents. On the question of the emissions trading system, on one side, we have National Grid, Energy UK, the Carbon Capture and Storage Association,

Make UK and the Confederation of British Industry welcoming it. On the other side, we have the shadow Minister and the deputy leader of the Reform party, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice). I think I know who I would take my advice from.

Net Zero Transition: Rural Economies

9. **Maya Ellis** (Ribble Valley) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that the transition to net zero supports rural economies. [904511]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone can access the benefits of our net zero transition, including rural communities, which will play a vital role in creating jobs and hosting infrastructure. That is why we have set up the £5 million Great British Energy community fund to support clean energy project development, including in constituencies like my hon. Friend's.

Maya Ellis: Many happy returns, Mr Speaker. Chipping Community Energy in my constituency is a brilliant ground source heat loop feasibility project. We know that grid infrastructure is weaker in rural areas, and there is a risk that more remote areas get left behind in the move to decarbonisation, in the same way that they did with the broadband roll-out. Will the Minister share what role she sees local initiatives, like Chipping Community Energy, playing in our overall plans for energy security and affordability, and what steps she is taking to help such projects to provide more cheap energy to our rural communities?

Kerry McCarthy: That sounds like a great project. We are absolutely committed to recognising the role that community energy groups, like the Chipping Community Land Trust, can play in ensuring that communities directly benefit from the energy transition. The trust was awarded £100,000 through the former rural community energy fund, and GB Energy is continuing that work through its community fund, helping to unleash the wave of community energy projects that the Secretary of State spoke about earlier. The Government and Ofgem will be working to tackle policy and regulatory barriers to these projects happening.

Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con): In the spirit of trying to get as many birthday wishes into one *Hansard* record as possible, Mr Speaker, from one part of the greatest county in the country to another, I wish you a very happy birthday.

In the context of the dash to net zero, rural economies can also be damaged by the infrastructure that is being put in. The Morgan and Morecambe wind farm cabling corridor and substations will cause damage to rural businesses over 20 miles along the cabling route, including disruption caused during the construction stage. What efforts is the Minister making to assess cases in which the infrastructure that is being put in place does more damage to rural economies than it benefits them?

Kerry McCarthy: If rural communities are to benefit from the clean energy transition, it is important that they play a role in hoping to host the infrastructure.

When the Great British Energy Bill went through Parliament, there was much discussion about ensuring that communities that host the new infrastructure do not lose out. I can send the hon. Gentleman details of exactly how his community can engage with that process.

Energy Efficiency

10. **Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): What steps he is taking to improve the energy efficiency of homes. [904512]

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): In 2025-26 alone, we will upgrade up to 300,000 homes through the warm homes plan and other measures. That is more than double the number of homes upgraded last year. Later this year, we will set out more details of a warm homes plan to upgrade up to 5 million homes, and there will be more details in the spending review tomorrow.

Lisa Smart: Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. My Lib Dem predecessor, the much-missed Andrew Stunell, pushed for the zero carbon homes programme during his time in the 2010 to 2015 Government, having brought in his first Bill on that subject back in 2004. Sadly, those standards were scrapped as soon as the Conservatives were governing on their own. The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit has estimated that, had those standards been reached in 2016, households would have paid £5 billion less in energy bills as a result of living in better insulated and more energy-efficient homes. The Secretary of State earlier mentioned the future homes standard, which is bringing in welcome steps on solar panels and so on. When will the Government go further to reach zero carbon homes standards with a fabric-first approach?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Lady raises an important question. The failure to have a zero carbon homes standard or future homes standard in place has meant that we have built over 1 million homes since then that are now going to have to be retrofitted. That makes no financial sense. It is right to put those upgrades in as standard from the get-go, and we have done a lot of work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and house builders to make sure that can be done in a way that also means we can build lots of homes.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What is the Secretary of State doing to make it more affordable for households to make their homes energy-efficient? The current model is that those who can afford to outlay some funding then get a taxpayer-funded subsidy, but those who cannot put down those first few thousand do not get that support.

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I am working with the Minister for Energy Consumers and others across Government on this as part of the warm homes plan. We have to make sure that those who can least afford it can take advantage of the huge opportunities of insulation, solar panels and batteries.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): Warm wishes for your birthday, Mr Speaker—and I am going to talk about warmth, as you might expect. Over the last decade, we have seen so many households living in Dickensian conditions, with dark, damp and cold homes, and having to choose between heating and eating. With the warm homes plan widely recognised as the most cost-effective way of making homes warmer, healthier and cheaper to heat, can the Secretary of State confirm exactly how many homes will be covered? Is the current scale of the plan truly sufficient to meet the challenge we face?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to be ambitious on these issues. Energy efficiency makes such sense for our country. We committed in our manifesto to upgrade 5 million homes and we intend to meet that commitment. I do not want to steal the Chancellor's thunder, but we will be saying more about that tomorrow.

Rosebank Oilfield

11. **John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): What steps he plans to take in relation to the Rosebank oilfield. [904513]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): The consent to develop the Rosebank oilfield was deemed unlawful by the courts. The developer will need to reapply for consent, including an assessment of emissions from burning the fuel produced. We will produce guidance on the environmental assessment of those emissions in due course.

John McDonnell: Have a good one, Mr Speaker!

The big issues to consider in this decision-making process will be the economic and environmental impacts. As the Government develop their thinking, will they consider and report to the House on another issue? Ithaca is one of the companies seeking to benefit from the large profits from the Rosebank development. It is owned by Delek, an Israeli oil conglomerate that has been listed recently by the UN for human rights abuses in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I do not believe that our Government would want to be associated with a company like that, and many pension funds are now divesting from that company, too. Can we have a report as the Government's thinking develops on that crucial matter?

Michael Shanks: I will be careful about what I say in this particular case and on the specific application for obvious reasons. We will be publishing guidance very soon on how the scope 3 emissions—the end-use emissions—will be assessed. Any developers with any projects that wish to reapply will then be able to do so. Each project will go through a regulatory process and be considered on its individual merits.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): Cabinet Office guidance states that Government Departments should aim to publish a response to a consultation within 12 weeks of the consultation closing. The consultation on environmental impact assessments closed on 8 January, which is 22 weeks ago tomorrow. When will the Department publish the guidance, because it is causing delays to projects in the North sea today?

Michael Shanks: We published the consultation on what we will do with the EIA guidance as quickly as we could. We are now analysing that. It is a complex issue, as I am sure the hon. Lady will understand. We will publish the response and the process that will now be put in place as soon as possible. Any developers that wish to reapply will then be able to do so.

Topical Questions

T1. [904527] **Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Since the last Energy Security and Net Zero oral questions, the Government have confirmed that rooftop solar panels will be standard for all new build homes, delivered the first 11 solar on schools projects, scrapped the absurd 1-metre heat pump rule, secured Royal Assent for the Great British Energy Bill and, alongside Ofgem, delivered compensation for 40,000 victims of the prepayment meter scandal that happened under the last Government.

Alice Macdonald: The east of England has a unique energy mix from offshore wind, hydrogen and nuclear. I welcome the game-changing investment in Sizewell C today. Can I ask specifically about wind? A new report from EastWind and Opergy says that in the east of England, we need more than 6,500 extra offshore wind farm workers. Does the Secretary of State agree that the east of England is central to our energy mission, and can he outline how we will deliver those skilled jobs?

Ed Miliband: The east of England will be a clean energy powerhouse for the country. My hon. Friend raises an important issue about workforce, and we will be publishing the workforce plan soon.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): In the dim and distant past, in 2023, the Secretary of State described the Rosebank oilfield as “a colossal waste of taxpayer money and climate vandalism”. Does he still agree with that?

Ed Miliband: As with any application, there is a process that my Department will go through. We will look at any application in a fair and objective way.

T3. [904529] **Becky Gittins** (Clwyd East) (Lab): I forgot to say this earlier, Mr Speaker: a very happy birthday from me and my constituents.

I commend the Secretary of State for seeing the need to reform our energy sector, given that people across north Wales are currently paying some of the highest energy bills in the country. Will he assure me that any proposed alternative to the current energy model will not put any one nation or region at a relative disadvantage?

The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones): We are developing proposals that will minimise costs and ensure a fair outcome for consumers throughout the country.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): The North sea's future lies in clean energy, but despite the UK's billing as a wind superpower, we still import most of our wind turbine components while communities around the North sea are losing jobs. Trade unions and industry are united in calling for £1.1 billion a year to build up domestic renewables manufacturing, but the Chancellor has committed barely half that. Will the Secretary of State work with his Cabinet colleagues to secure the investment that is needed to realise the job-creating potential of the green just transition?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We are trying not just to build the renewables that we need for the future, but to bring the good jobs, the manufacturing and the industry along with them. The Prime Minister has announced £200 million of support for supply chains through Great British Energy, and there will be much more to come. We are also working individually with projects and developers to ensure that we bring the jobs here, and that is why the clean industry bonus is so important.

T5. [904531] **Paul Davies** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Over recent months I have received numerous emails from constituents in Hade Edge expressing concern about repeated energy outages. The most recent incident occurred on 26 May, affecting 389 customers. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that energy suppliers such as Northern Powergrid invest in upgrading their infrastructure so that communities like Hade Edge no longer have to worry about outages?

Michael Shanks: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The UK's energy grid is very resilient, but we are investing to make sure that remains the case in the decades ahead. Ofgem requires transmission owners and distribution network operators to make sure that there is an efficient, economic and co-ordinated system of electricity transmission in the country—and to make sure that it works—but if he wishes to raise any specific issues, I would be happy to hear from him.

T2. [904528] **Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): On 21 May, the Government published their working paper on community benefits, but contributions are unlikely to be made mandatory before a decision is made about the huge Botley West plant in my constituency. Does the Minister agree that a responsible developer would offer my constituents a level of benefit in line with that proposed by the Government?

Michael Shanks: Yes, and I was grateful for the opportunity to meet the hon. Gentleman recently to discuss exactly those points. We encourage all developers to provide a range of local community benefits, and we are consulting on whether that should go further, but in the meantime we want to see community benefit schemes that are as strong as possible for all energy projects, right across the country.

T6. [904532] **Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): Happy Labubu birthday, Mr Speaker!

Our most climate-friendly nations require investment to adapt to the effects of climate change, but sadly a number of them are facing a debt crisis and are spending a lot of money on paying sky-high interest rates to lenders. Given that 90% of the debt contracts are governed by English law, will the Government ensure that private lenders take part in debt relief schemes in order to tackle the climate emergency effectively?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Kerry McCarthy): This is the subject of ongoing discussions between our Department and, in particular, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: we want to ensure that we are not giving with one hand and taking away with the other. That is part of the remodelling that will enable us to supply international climate finance to the people who need it most.

T4. [904530] **Chris Law** (Dundee Central) (SNP): I wish you a happy birthday, Mr Speaker. In its manifesto last year, the Scottish Labour party promised to create 69,000 Scottish jobs in the clean energy industries of the future, but on "The Sunday Show" the Scottish Labour leader was unable to answer any questions about that. May I ask how many jobs have been created so far, how this is progressing, and when the target will be met?

Michael Shanks: The hon. Gentleman is right, in that we had ambitious plans in our manifesto to create thousands of jobs funded through Great British Energy—something that he failed to vote for, so he is now against the investment that will come. We have secured £40 billion-worth of private investment since we came to office, with hundreds of jobs and many, many thousands to come.

T7. [904533] **Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): Thousands of my constituents in Barking receive their energy via a heat network provided by their landlord or a housing association. In many cases, they are not eligible for the warm home discount. What plans do the Government have to make sure that those constituents receive the support they need?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh): We have had challenges with heat networks across the country. That is why we are bringing forward regulations to make sure both that there is a fair price for people on heat networks and that technical standards drive up the quality of heat networks, so that people can have cheaper bills.

T8. [904534] **Alex Brewer** (North East Hampshire) (LD): Standing order charges are making energy bills unaffordable, particularly for those on lower incomes. What steps are Ministers taking to address this?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Lady raises a really important point about the level of standing order charges, and this is something that Ofgem has consulted on. The complexity is that if we redistribute standing order charges, it can have significant adverse distributional effects, but Ofgem is seeking to have low standing order charges for some customers.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): Wasco Coatings in my constituency has invested significantly in its Hartlepool operation in anticipation of the ambitious net zero plans on Teesside. We now learn that there is a possibility that the contract may go abroad, which threatens Hartlepool jobs. Does the Minister agree that British investment must back British jobs, and does she have a message for those deciding on the contract?

Sarah Jones: The Northern Endurance Partnership, which is developing the infrastructure to transport CO₂ across Teesside and the Humber, will create thousands of jobs. There is a 50% local content target, but we want to exceed that, and I urge the partnership to use British suppliers. I think my hon. Friend is meeting its representatives this week. We stand ready to do so, and we want everyone to buy British.

T9. [904535] **Jack Rankin** (Windsor) (Con): Research from Centrica, which is headquartered on my patch, shows that Hive has saved domestic customers half a billion pounds on their energy bills since its inception. Does the Secretary of State agree that smart data, which gives consumers the ability to control their energy use without the need for top-down bans, taxes and mandates, should be a key plank of the warm homes plan?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point. Minimum half-hourly charges will also help customers to use smart solutions and make savings, and all the evidence collected under the last Government shows that when consumer-led flexibility was offered, people really took advantage of it.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Making community energy the centrepiece of the Government's clean power plan will foster support for new schemes by putting the public in the driving seat to choose where, and at what scale, projects can fit into local landscapes. To unleash the full potential of community energy, will Ministers consider implementing the long-standing proposals to enable these schemes to sell electricity directly to local people?

Kerry McCarthy: The Government's licence exemption schemes already allow small-scale suppliers, including many community energy groups, to come to market to supply local customers. The Secretary of State has also commissioned Ofgem to work with the Department to explore some of the policy and regulatory barriers to local supply.

T10. [904536] **Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): In 2026, Formula 1 will be using a fully sustainable drop-in fuel in all its cars. Does the Secretary of State agree that this provides an exciting opportunity for the UK to lead the world in using research and development from Formula 1 to support the pursuit of net zero for all motorists, and will he agree to meet me and representatives of motor sport to discuss this issue further?

Ed Miliband: Yes. That sounds really good.

David Williams (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. At the former Chatterley Whitfield colliery in my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove, the council has launched an ambitious

plan to go from black to green, creating a combined digital and eco park that includes an AI growth zone. Will the Secretary of State meet me—alongside my constituency neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner), who has championed this cause, and partners—to see for himself the potential of our coalfield communities?

Ed Miliband: That also sounds really good, and it sounds like a really important initiative. The idea of AI growth zones, which have been promoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Science, Technology and Innovation, is great, and I congratulate my hon. Friend.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): May I extend an invite to the Secretary of State to come to Aberdeen and meet the highly skilled energy workforce, whose jobs are being put at risk as a result of his policies?

Ed Miliband: I absolutely meet North sea workers and companies. What we need to do for them is build the clean energy future so that they can transition. That is about carbon capture and storage, hydrogen and offshore wind, and it is about nuclear as well—something that SNP Members oppose. This Government are going to make the investments to make it happen.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Lang may yer lum reek, Mr Speaker.

The Minister may know that we used to have nuclear power in Ayrshire, creating many well-paying jobs. Does he think we could see small modular reactors at Hunterston, and what does he think of the SNP's abject failure to bring nuclear to Scotland, even though it has planned for an independent Scotland to rely on English nuclear?

Ed Miliband: The SNP's is an anti-jobs, anti-investment and anti-clean energy position, and SNP Members should be ashamed of themselves.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): During the last election campaign, the Secretary of State said he would cut energy bills by £300. Could he set out for families and small businesses in Bridgwater the timescale for fulfilling that promise?

Ed Miliband: We said we would cut energy bills by up to £300 by 2030, and that remains our commitment.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): Penn-bloodh lowen, Mr Speaker.

I welcome the Government's commitment to nuclear energy as a means of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, but I am concerned that far less attention has been given to another low-carbon, low marginal cost, firm baseload power source—deep geothermal. By some estimates, there are over 30 GW of geothermal energy potential in the Cornish granite batholith alone. What are the Government doing to assess and unlock this untapped geothermal potential?

Michael Shanks: As always, my hon. Friend is a great champion for his local area and its different energy sources. I am very happy to meet him, as geothermal

has huge opportunities. I think some of it has yet to come to market, but we look at all opportunities for delivering clean power.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker—I suspect you may be relieved that we cannot sing in the Chamber.

I was recently approached by a small business owner in my constituency of Edinburgh West who faces bill of almost £30,000 for the period of lockdown when her business was closed. She is getting no sense out of British Gas Lite about why she is facing this bill, and I am getting no response from it. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can find out what is happening?

Mr Speaker: A quick yes will do.

Miatta Fahnbulleh: Yes.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker.

The York Central development site at the heart of my constituency has been found to be a rich source of deep geothermal energy. Will the Minister meet me to look at how we can bring this on stream to heat the 2,500 homes and support the 12,500 jobs there will be on that site?

Michael Shanks: I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend. There are a number of schemes like this already. The Mining Remediation Authority has a number of projects under way. There is huge potential, and I am happy to meet her to discuss it.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker, and despite what has been said by colleagues on the Benches in front of me, you do not look a day over 75. [*Laughter.*]

While the Minister is claiming to save the world by closing down the oil and gas industry in the United Kingdom, Centrica has signed a £20 billion deal with Norway to supply gas to the United Kingdom. How does he justify the loss of British jobs, giving away tax revenue and putting growth in jeopardy by closing down an industry that is still much needed?

Michael Shanks: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong on two fronts. First, we are not closing down oil and gas. It will continue to play a part for many years to come, but there is a transition under way, as there has been for many years. The truth of the matter is that, while we want to create the jobs that come next, he turns his face against all the investment in what those jobs will be, which means that, under his plan, the transition will not lead to a future for that incredibly skilled workforce. We are determined to do it differently, so that there are good, well-paid jobs in the future and a secure energy mix for decades to come.

Mr Speaker: I thank everybody who has wished me well for my birthday. I got the best birthday present, and that was the knighthood for Sir Billy Boston, who had to leave Wales to play rugby league. This is the first knighthood for rugby league, so it is the best present I could have had.

Nuclear Power: Investment

12.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): With permission, I would like to make a statement about Government plans for investment in new nuclear power.

Sixteen years ago, in 2009, as Energy Secretary I delivered a statement to this House identifying potential sites for new nuclear. I said:

“We need to use all available low-carbon sources... New nuclear is right for energy security and climate change, and it will be good for jobs too”.—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2009; Vol. 499, c. 31.]

That was true back then, and it is even more true today. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the cost of living crisis that followed showed how vulnerable we are as a country because of our dependence on fossil fuels, at the whim of markets controlled by petrostates and dictators. The imperative of energy security and the demands of the climate crisis mean that we must shift as fast as possible to clean, home-grown power. The demand for that power, as we shift away from gas, is expected to at least double by 2050, so we need all the low-carbon sources possible to meet the demands we face.

The advice from experts, including the Climate Change Committee, is clear: we need new nuclear to meet our climate obligations. This Government support new nuclear because of our belief that the climate crisis is the greatest long-term threat facing our country and our world, not in spite of it; because of the imperative of energy security; and because of the good, skilled jobs that nuclear provides. In Britain today, there are too few industries that offer the secure, well-paid jobs with strong trade unions that the British people desire and deserve. Time and again, I have heard from people up and down the country about the importance of nuclear jobs to their communities. For all these reasons, the Government are taking decisive steps today to usher in a new golden age of nuclear for Britain.

First, back in the late 2000s, when I was Energy Secretary, I identified Sizewell as a potential site for new nuclear. It has taken 16 years, but I am incredibly proud that today we are announcing £14.2 billion of public funding for this spending review period to build Sizewell C, the first Government-funded and owned nuclear power station in Britain since the 1980s—a strategic partnership with France, with EDF intending to invest alongside us.

I recognise the contribution of my hon. Friends the Members for Lowestoft (Jess Asato) and for Ipswich (Jack Abbott) in advocating for this project and my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) for her advocacy for nuclear as a whole. I also acknowledge the work of the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), who is not in his place, when he was Minister for nuclear.

Sizewell C will power the equivalent of around 6 million homes with clean, home-grown energy for 60 years, and will be a jobs and growth engine for Britain, supporting 10,000 jobs at peak construction and creating 1,500 apprenticeships—well-paid, highly skilled jobs in East Anglia and communities across the country. I thank the GMB, Unite, and Prospect trade unions, which are brilliant champions for the nuclear industry.

Sizewell has already signed £4.2 billion-worth of contracts with 311 companies, and will eventually work with 3,500 suppliers in all four nations of the UK.

This project is good value for money for the taxpayer, because there will be a clear economic return on the investment, and for the bill payer, because all the due diligence we have done demonstrates that the cost of the clean power it will supply will be cheaper than the alternative. We expect the final investment decision on the project, including through the capital raise from the private sector, to be completed in the summer, when we will set out further detail. This is a new generation of nuclear power, promised for years and delivered by this Labour Government.

Secondly, small modular reactors offer a huge industrial opportunity for our country, and we are determined to harness Britain’s nuclear expertise to win the global race to lead in this new technology. I can inform the House that following a rigorous two-year competition, today Rolls-Royce SMR has been selected as the preferred bidder to develop the UK’s first SMRs, subject to final Government approvals and contract signature. This initial project could create up to 3,000 skilled jobs and power the equivalent of around 3 million homes.

In the spending review, we are committing to the public investment needed to get the SMR programme off the ground, with more than £2.5 billion in funding over the period. The project will be delivered by Great British Energy Nuclear, a publicly owned company headquartered in Warrington—an allied company to Great British Energy, which is headquartered in Aberdeen. Subject to Government approvals, the contracts will be signed later this year. Our aim is to deliver one of Europe’s first SMR fleets, leading the world in the nuclear technologies of the future, with more good jobs and energy security funded and made possible by this Labour Government.

Thirdly, beyond the immediate horizon, nuclear fusion offers the potential of an energy-abundant future. Britain already leads, thanks to the pioneering work of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, but unlike in the past, we are determined to make the investments to stay ahead as a country. Today, we are pledging to invest more than £2.5 billion in nuclear fusion, including in the STEP—spherical tokamak for energy production—programme, which will help to progress the new prototype fusion plant at West Burton. I congratulate the Mayor of the East Midlands, Claire Ward, on her tireless advocacy for this project, as well as my hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw (Jo White) and for Rushcliffe (James Naish) on their advocacy. This will be the first fusion plant of its kind in the world, and it will be on the site of a former coal-fired power station. Under a Labour Government, Britain will lead the clean energy transition and trailblaze the technologies of the future.

Fourthly, our nuclear ambitions do not stop there. As we move ahead on these projects, we see huge potential right across the country. That is why we are looking to provide a route for private sector-led advanced nuclear projects—advanced modular reactors and SMRs—to be deployed in the UK. And we will task Great British Energy Nuclear with a new role in assessing proposals, with the National Wealth Fund exploring potential investment opportunities. My message to the private sector is that if it wants to build new nuclear, Britain is open for business.

[Ed Miliband]

I can also tell the House that, following the incredible campaigning work of my hon. Friends the Members for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister), for Carlisle (Ms Minns), for Penrith and Solway (Markus Campbell-Savours) and for Barrow and Furness (Michelle Scrogg), my Department has asked the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and Cumberland council to consider the potential of privately led clean energy development in Moorside, delivering jobs and growth in Cumbria.

We also know that this is an industry that demands long-term thinking. Therefore, having announced these steps today, we will build on our 2030 clean power action plan and set out our plans for the energy system, including our ambitions and next steps on nuclear, into the 2030s and beyond.

Taken together, the steps that I have announced today will kick off the biggest nuclear building programme that Britain has seen in half a century, doubling down on our nuclear strength to take the latest step forward in our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. When people ask what clean energy and net zero means for our country, this is what it is all about. For too long, our country has not made the crucial investments in energy or infrastructure that we need. The British people have paid the price for this short-sighted failure to invest—in lower living standards, insecurity and declining public services. This week's announcements signal a decisive change in approach—to invest in the future and make the right choice for energy security, the right choice for jobs, the right choice for climate, our children and grandchildren, the right choice for Britain, and the right choice of investment over decline. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

12.46 pm

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

The Conservative party is a pro-nuclear party and we welcome any decisions, backed by investment, that increase Britain's nuclear capacity, because we cannot deliver cheap, reliable and secure energy without it. Although the investment announced today by the Secretary of State is significant, it is a fraction of the £230 billion cost, which will ultimately be borne by consumers, of his plan to decarbonise the grid. Unlike the intermittent technologies backed at such cost by the Secretary of State, nuclear provides reliable baseload power. It generates inertia to stabilise our grid. Nuclear power plants require substantially less new grid infrastructure compared with dispersed generation from wind and solar. It is to the shame of successive Governments over many years that Britain relinquished its status as a world leader in civil nuclear technologies. In 1965, we had more nuclear reactors than the United States, the USSR and the rest of the world put together. Between 1956 and 1966, we built 10 nuclear power stations, but we gave all that up. The contribution of nuclear to our power generation peaked in 1994 and has fallen consistently since then.

Labour came to power in 1997, saying that it saw no economic case for the building of any new nuclear power stations. In 2010, the coalition agreement ruled

out public investment in nuclear. It was the last Conservative Government who planned the largest revival of nuclear power in 70 years and it is thanks to that work that the Secretary of State has been able to make many of these announcements today. Can he reiterate, despite the headlines this morning, that the final investment decision has not yet been made? He said in his statement that he will announce it in the summer, but can he give us a more precise date when we will be told the total Government investment and the private capital raised?

This statement is a downgrade on what the previous Government put in motion. Today, the Energy Secretary has announced only one small modular reactor. There is no clear target to increase nuclear power generation and no news on Wylfa. The nuclear industry is expecting news of a third gigawatt scale reactor. The previous Government purchased the land and committed to build, but on this today the Energy Secretary said nothing. Can he commit to the planning inherited for a third gigawatt scale plant at Wylfa and will he recommit to the Conservative policy of 24 GW of nuclear power by 2050?

Although it is good news that Rolls-Royce will build our first small modular reactors, this is a downgrade on what was previously planned. Can the Secretary of State tell us why he has awarded just one technology rather than two as set out previously? Furthermore, will he commit, as other countries have, to going faster?

Canada has approved a plan for four SMRs by 2029. As things stand, Britain will not have SMRs connected to the grid until the 2030s. The contrast between this caution on nuclear and the Government's rush to decarbonise the entire grid in just five years, while betting the house on unreliable and intermittent renewable technologies and shutting down British oil and gas in the North sea, could not be clearer. We need the Energy Secretary to focus on the positive, not to stake our country's future and people's bills on ideology.

Ed Miliband: I feel a bit sorry for the hon. Gentleman; it is hard on a day like this to be an Opposition Member. Nevertheless, I will try to answer his questions, such as they are. On the question about the final investment decision, he will be aware that we are currently doing the private sector capital raise. When that is complete, we will proceed to the final investment decision, which will take place this summer. That is obviously important.

On his fundamental question, I do slightly scratch my head, because he says that this is a downgrade—we have announced the largest nuclear building programme in 50 years! What he says might have looked good in the mirror this morning, but it does not bear much resemblance to reality. The question, which goes to the point I made at the end of my statement, is this: why did the Conservatives make all these promises on nuclear but fail to deliver them? There is a simple answer. It was not because of a lack of diligence from his colleague the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie). The simple reason is that they did not put up the money. They did not make the investment. The one thing that has bedevilled the nuclear programme is a failure to invest public money.

In this spending review we are putting in £14 billion for Sizewell, £2.5 billion for SMRs, and £2.5 billion for fusion. Those are significant sums of long-term capital investment. The Conservatives made all these promises,

but they did not put in the money. I was the guy who identified Sizewell, and I am back here delivering Sizewell. This Government are willing to make the investment. We welcome the support from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), such as it is, but he needs to learn some lessons. Public investment, not decline, is the answer for Britain.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on delivering on his promise from 2009 and confirming Sizewell C, along with the vast array of commitments to a bright nuclear future for this country. The Select Committee looks forward to our inquiry in the autumn into the future of nuclear; we will be taking evidence and making recommendations to support the work that the Secretary of State has set out. We visited Sizewell C, and I also visited the nuclear physics department at the University of Liverpool. I learned in both cases about the jobs that will be available across the country. Can the Secretary of State confirm that he sees this as the start of both gigawatt construction of new nuclear and a big expansion into SMRs and AMRs, which are still a nascent technology, to support a very good future for nuclear generation in this country?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend speaks very well on this subject. I agree with him about the huge jobs potential from new nuclear and the timelines. My priority when we came into office was to get these things over the line, because there had been so many promises made by the last Government. Long-term promises were made under Boris Johnson for 2050, but they did not deliver anything towards the 24 GW target. My priority was to get on and deliver these things and get them over the line, which we are doing. Then we can look at what the energy needs are going forward and how we meet them. I agree with my hon. Friend that nuclear has an essential part to play, alongside all the other clean energy technologies; electricity demand is going to double by 2050, so we need all of them.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): We welcome the Government's renewed focus on energy security through nuclear power as part of the energy mix. It is long overdue, after years of dither and delay from successive Conservative Governments. It has been 16 years since Sizewell C was first announced in 2009, and now, seven Prime Ministers later, we are finally seeing real movement. That is not a success story but a warning. Short-term thinking, poor delivery and exorbitant costs—

Nick Timothy: Are you quoting Nick Clegg?

Pippa Heylings: Will the hon. Member let me continue?

Mr Speaker: Order. I will decide when things are out of order. I do not need any help. I want you to get the question finished quickly, so come on.

Pippa Heylings: I cannot help but wonder whether the Secretary of State imagined when he stood at his Dispatch Box back in 2009 that he would be back in 2025 still announcing funding for the same project.

We support investment in clean, home-grown energy. Small modular nuclear reactors have real potential to reduce our dependence on foreign gas—from tyrants like Putin—and help bring down bills, so we welcome the Government's backing of the nascent technology of small modular reactors and their choice of Rolls-Royce, which is recognised as a first mover across all of Europe. That is where the focus should be—not on large-scale projects like Sizewell C that cost billions, take decades and so often go over budget. We have to ensure that this does not land consumers with higher energy bills. That risk is very real. The Government must be transparent about how this will be paid for, because families cannot afford another hit to their household budgets.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the best way to cut bills, create good jobs and boost energy security is to invest in home-grown renewables such as solar, wind, tidal and geothermal, and to upgrade our national grid to deliver that clean power. We look forward to seeing more detail on the long-overdue reform of the outdated first come, first served grid connection system, which is holding back renewable energy projects and could even delay the roll-out of new SMRs. Today's announcement is a step in the right direction, but the real test is in the delivery of cheaper bills, stronger energy security and a modern energy grid fit for the future.

Ed Miliband: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution. I feel bad about mentioning this, but she has slightly airbrushed out the role of the current leader of the Liberal Democrats, who was Energy Secretary for a period, but we will “Trosky”—to use a familial term of origin—that out of the record.

I sincerely welcome her support for this programme, and she puts the case very well: it is a lesson to some of the Opposition Members sitting behind her that we need all the clean energy technologies; we should not choose between them. Being in favour of nuclear does not mean that we are against wind. I am the biggest enthusiast for offshore wind, onshore wind, solar and all these technologies. Let us have all of them, to get off fossil fuels and meet our electricity and energy demand.

Josh MacAlister (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and happy birthday; you were born only a few months after the opening of Calder Hall, the world's first civil nuclear power plant, so you share that.

The Secretary of State has made the major decision, which is incredibly welcome in west Cumbria, to unlock up to 200 acres of land at Moorside for clean energy projects, including new nuclear. This issue has been stuck for many years, and I welcome the Secretary of State's efforts on it, the decision he made and the work he has done with the Cumberland Nuclear Future Board to make it happen. Will the Secretary of State continue to work with me and local partners to drive the project through so that we get something delivered at the site? Secondly, can he say more about the regulatory taskforce that is being undertaken at the moment so that we can cut through the bureaucracy and build reactors more quickly?

Ed Miliband: To reassure you, Mr Speaker, you look much younger than the Calder Hall nuclear power station.

Mr Speaker: And it is being decommissioned—that is even worse!

Ed Miliband: Absolutely right—there will be no decommissioning of you, Mr Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on showing incredible leadership for his constituents on this issue. It has been a pleasure to work with him and other colleagues on these questions. He is right about the potential; he is also right about the regulatory question. We have some of the highest standards of regulation in the world, but it is always right that we look at how we can improve standards of regulation and avoid changes in regulation during the course of projects, which is crucial for success. That is the work we are getting on with.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. To give credit where it is due, I totally welcome today's announcement on nuclear. Where I disagree with the Secretary of State is on his persistence to plough ahead with inefficient technologies such as solar and the associated paraphernalia, such as battery storage, which trash the Buckinghamshire countryside and, indeed, the wider British countryside. Nuclear works 24/7; solar works about 10% of the time. Will he have greater courage and plough ahead with this much more efficient 24/7 nuclear technology and drop solar?

Ed Miliband: I thank the hon. Member for part of what he said, if not most of it. We have a fundamental disagreement. Solar and wind offer cheap power for our country—why would we possibly say no to that? The biggest threat to the countryside is the climate crisis, and solar and wind alongside nuclear are the way to tackle it.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I, too, wish you a happy birthday, Mr Speaker. I very much welcome the statement, which is about the future-visioning and future-proofing of our energy security and production. I particularly welcome the £2.5 billion investment in fusion, including for the STEP—spherical tomahawk for energy production—programme at West Burton in north Nottinghamshire. I thank Ministers for their work to secure that, which is very welcome indeed. The process has already started, with the tender outcomes for the construction and the design and technology to be announced later this year. I am championing British companies, which are very much part of that process.

I am excited about the thousands of jobs and skills in new infrastructure that will be developed because of this programme. The work has already started on the skills partnership, which is stretching right across regions including the east midlands, Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire. That partnership is working with our further education colleges, our universities and the advanced manufacturing centre in Rotherham. Does the Secretary of State agree that left-behind, red wall areas such as mine are where we need investment to revise our energy production and our industry? This is where we start, and I want to see more.

Ed Miliband: I thank my hon. Friend for her advocacy. When I was in discussions with the Chancellor, I did think that if this did not go ahead I would have to answer to my hon. Friend and to the Mayor of the East Midlands, so she was a motivating force in ensuring that the project did go ahead. Her point is crucial: this is about good jobs in areas of the country that really need those good jobs. Last night, I was talking to an apprentice from Sizewell—she went there at age 16 and has been there for a year—about the experience she has had. She gives credit to Sizewell. We can see her career in front of her, and we want that for lots more people.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Assuming that the large nuclear power station at Sizewell C and the small modular reactors both prove to be successful, as we trust they will be, what is the Government's thinking about the respective roles of each of those two very different types? Which does the Secretary of State think will be the better bet in the long term for the future of the country? Can he assure us that China will have no part in any of this?

Ed Miliband: On the latter point, yes, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman of that. He asks a typically astute question, if I may say so. The truth about these technologies, I think, is that the answer is both. We cannot really make a judgment about this until we see the SMR programme developed. The SMR programme offers something that has eluded nuclear for a long time, which is modularity and replication, and that, as we know from other technologies, is the way to bring down costs and speed up delivery. There is huge potential in both, but large-scale gigawatt can also play an important role.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield Heeley) (Lab): I warmly welcome the SMR announcement, which is great news for Sheffield as Rolls-Royce is already doing significant work at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. When I met Rolls-Royce recently, it said that 70% of its bid could be built and produced in Great Britain. How will the Government hold Rolls-Royce to account for that and ensure that the announcement delivers great jobs and great investment right across the UK?

Ed Miliband: I thank my right hon. Friend for her incredible advocacy on this issue, including at the AMRC. She makes such an important point: this will be taxpayers' money, and we need to ensure that as much as possible is built in Britain. I make absolutely no apologies for saying that. The answer to her question is that as we negotiate terms with Rolls-Royce over the coming months, that will be a key part of our discussions.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This £14 billion splurge on English nuclear power plants comes on top of £22 billion for English carbon capture and storage, while there is nothing for Scotland's Acorn project. With Grangemouth allowed to close and the fiscal regime ruining the north-east's energy jobs, this latest announcement shows that Scotland is not an afterthought—Scotland is not a thought at all. If nearly £40 billion can be found for English energy projects, why has money never been found for Scotland's carbon capture project?

Ed Miliband: Maybe a change in the SNP's position is coming. Absolutely, if the hon. Lady wants, let us have a discussion about Scottish nuclear power stations. We are in favour of the Acorn project and will say more about that in the coming weeks. But on nuclear power, SNP Members have really got to think again. They are sticking their heads in the sand. This is about jobs, investment and clean energy. They should really rethink.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): If I had known it was your birthday, Mr Speaker, I would have brought you down a Chorley cake, but never mind. As you know, my constituency hosts Heysham 1 and 2 nuclear power stations. As the Secretary of State is aware, I am pushing for Heysham also to host new nuclear. Will he tell me how today's announcement supports nuclear communities such as mine and will enable the next generation of nuclear across the country?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. To get slightly into the weeds, the new planning framework that we are consulting on opens up possibilities for new nuclear. Today we have set out the public money that we can commit to new nuclear at this stage. We are seeing this a bit in the US and in other countries with a 50% increase in nuclear investment last year globally. My message to the private sector is that if it is interested in partnering with us and saying to us, "We want to build in places other than those where you've put the public investment," we are absolutely open for business and dialogue.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that it was originally proposed to build a third nuclear power station, based on a Chinese design, at Bradwell-on-Sea in my constituency. Is a third station—it will not be Chinese—at Bradwell still a possibility, or could it be allocated an SMR?

Ed Miliband: Good nuclear sites, including Bradwell, are always going to be possibilities as far as I am concerned. We are not going to have China building our nuclear power stations, but if the right hon. Gentleman wants to discuss this with my Department, we will be happy to do so.

Claire Hughes (Bangor Aberconwy) (Lab): It is clear that this Labour Government are putting pounds behind promises to deliver clean energy and good, skilled jobs in all parts of the country. With that in mind, given its importance to north Wales, will my right hon. Friend confirm that Great British Energy Nuclear will prioritise Wylfa?

Ed Miliband: I am glad that my hon. Friend has asked that question. Wylfa is an incredibly important site that has huge potential for our country. Obviously, over the months ahead Great British Energy Nuclear will look at the role that Wylfa can play in relation to SMRs and large-scale nuclear.

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): The Secretary of State's message to the private sector is, "If you want to build new nuclear, Britain is open." Companies have told me that they need decisive and committed leadership from the UK Government to be confident to invest in a new project at Wylfa. I have raised that 11 times in the

Chamber, yet today there was no mention of Wylfa. Will the Secretary of State make it clear that the UK Government support the delivery of new nuclear projects at Wylfa?

Ed Miliband: Yes, we do. Again, we are open to discussions with the hon. Lady and other colleagues.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I will not say "happy birthday" to you again, Mr Speaker; perhaps we can arrange to sing it next time so that we do not all have to repeat it.

The Secretary of State's statement is welcome. The other welcome news today is the Government's commitment to £460 million of investment at Sheffield Forgemasters. That is primarily for defence nuclear, but it also provides extra capacity for civil nuclear. There is a bit of concern about Rolls-Royce's link with Czechia, so will my right hon. Friend commit to using forgings from Sheffield Forgemasters in the first-of-its-type SMR in this country and build the supply chain so that the vast majority of jobs are provided for British workers?

Ed Miliband: I definitely believe that Sheffield Forgemasters has an incredibly important role to play in our civil nuclear programme. Contractual details for Rolls-Royce and our discussions with the company are for a bit down the road, but in my view, Forgemasters is central to our plans.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Oldbury in my constituency is one of the sites under consideration for SMRs, and I have been told many times that it has many factors going for it, including GB Nuclear's ownership of it, the nuclear expertise in higher education locally, its existing nuclear history and the potential for co-ordination with the Berkeley site. Given that the old nuclear power station has already been decommissioned, the local community wants to know what the future looks like. Will the Secretary of State confirm that Oldbury is still in the running and will he give a timeline for the decision?

Ed Miliband: As part of the process that we go to from here, Great British Energy Nuclear will look at what is the right place for the SMR fleet and, absolutely, Oldbury is one of the candidates.

Baggy Shanker (Derby South) (Lab/Co-op): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I also wish you a happy birthday, Mr Speaker. What a wonderful day today is proving to be. As a proud Derby MP, I am delighted to welcome the selection of Rolls-Royce to deliver the first of the UK's small modular reactors. We know that the Secretary of State, his ministerial team and the Mayor of the East Midlands are champions of clean energy jobs. Does the Secretary of State agree that today's decision is good news for the country and for Derby? Also, in backing home-grown SMRs, what will the benefit be for UK workers and those in the east midlands region?

Ed Miliband: I thank my hon. Friend for his advocacy for Derby and for Rolls-Royce. It is important to say to the House that this was a fair and open competition, conducted at arm's length from Ministers. Rolls-Royce

[*Ed Miliband*]

came out as the winner and I am incredibly pleased about that. The possibilities for Rolls-Royce are huge in what it can do for SMRs in this country, in the export opportunities and in the jobs in the supply chains. That is the thing about nuclear: it is about the jobs not just at the top of the tree but right across the supply chain that we have the potential to create.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): While I fear that the development of Sizewell C may prove to be a multibillion-pound investment in yesterday's technology, I welcome the commitment to SMRs in so far as it goes, which is probably the way forward for tomorrow. We have to get from where we are today to there. Why are we going to spend billions of pounds and accumulate masses of wastage importing carbon fuels from overseas instead of developing our own North sea resources?

Ed Miliband: On the nuclear point, there is real potential at Sizewell. I understand the implication of his views on that: to learn from what happened at Hinkley—because it is a replica of Hinkley—and therefore to cut the costs and do it quicker. The aim is to deliver it cheaper and faster. On the wider picture, we may have a difference of view. Mine is that we have to get off insecure fossil fuels as quickly as possible. That is why nuclear has a role and renewables have a role, but the existing North sea fields will be kept open for their lifetime, so oil and gas will continue to play a role in our energy system.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. New nuclear has the potential not only to power communities across our country, but to create jobs in every constituency. That is why it is particularly extraordinary to hear SNP representatives argue against those jobs. Will the Secretary of State confirm how many new jobs will be created by today's announcement and what conversations he has had with workplace representatives to ensure that those are genuinely good jobs, with good terms and conditions?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that in all respects. Sizewell alone will create 10,000 jobs at peak and 1,500 apprenticeships. For good safety and other reasons, there is a strong trade union tradition in the nuclear industry, which we intend to uphold. As for the situation in Scotland, it genuinely beggars belief that the SNP would turn its back on such a huge opportunity.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on nuclear energy, and having championed the nuclear industry for 20 years in this Parliament, even when it was not popular on either side of the House, I very much welcome today's announcement, because I have seen over 60 years in my constituency the economic impact of the Chapelcross nuclear power station. Returning to the subject of Scotland, we see the SNP's intransigence, which is costing Scotland jobs on the nuclear front. Will the Secretary of State ensure that if we will not have nuclear power stations, we can at least have jobs in the supply chain?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his long-standing advocacy on the issue, including when it was not popular. He makes a very good point: we need to see a change in Government in Scotland, to a Labour party that will advocate for nuclear. The supply chain in all four nations of the UK can play a crucial role in the nuclear renaissance that we are announcing today.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): A very happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. May I thank the Secretary of State for today's announcement, which represents a massive boost for my constituents in Erewash and a huge vote of confidence for Rolls-Royce just down the road in Derby? How does he foresee the announcement affecting the availability of apprenticeships for kids leaving my local schools in Ilkeston and Long Eaton?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises such an important point. There is a good tradition of apprenticeships in nuclear. I have seen it at Hinkley Point C and we will see it at Sizewell. I am sure, and I will make sure, that we will see it in the SMR programme as well. These are fantastic opportunities for young people and opportunities that we intend to make happen.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): Will the Secretary of State tell the House a bit more about the regulated asset base funding model for Sizewell C? In particular, will he assure the public that the construction phase of Sizewell C will not be funded by increases to people's bills, given that it will be well over a decade—potentially nearer two decades if we look at Hinkley Point—before it produces any new electricity?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman will know that the RAB system that was passed through this House involves the role of bill payers. We believe that that is the right system and will cut the cost compared with Hinkley Point C. The hon. Gentleman appears to oppose many different forms of clean power. He opposes transmission infrastructure for offshore wind and solar, he opposes solar farms, he opposes carbon capture and storage, and I guess he opposes nuclear. I have an all-of-the-above position on clean energy; he seems to have a none-of-the-above position.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): I am delighted that Rolls-Royce has been selected to deliver SMRs in the UK. It really is time for us to stop delaying the new fleet of nuclear power stations more broadly. The Secretary of State will remember that he came to my constituency before the election, to the Barnoldswick Rolls-Royce site, and heard that it now supports 400 jobs, whereas pre-pandemic it was 900. This is a huge opportunity for us to create good skilled jobs in all parts of the country, so will he reassure me that the Government as the customer of Rolls-Royce will demand that those jobs go to places such as Barnoldswick and all over the UK and that we stop the offshoring of manufacturing?

Ed Miliband: I was incredibly impressed by what I saw at Barnoldswick. I had to maintain a position of neutrality when I became Secretary of State as to who won the competition, but I am incredibly pleased that Rolls-Royce won the competition fair and square. My

hon. Friend makes an important point about making sure that the jobs go to places such as Barnoldswick. I am sure that Rolls-Royce will want to do that.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): Capula, based in Stone, is an example of a great British company that has been supplying the electricity-generation industry in this country for many decades. To get the very best for British jobs, how can businesses such as Capula link in at the very earliest stages with the Government as they start to plan how the investment will be made?

Ed Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important issue; let me take this away. As we embark on this golden age for nuclear, we need to make sure that the supply chain really benefits. Perhaps he could furnish my Department with the details so that we can think about how such companies can benefit?

Mrs Elsie Blundell (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement. I have been speaking to people from across my constituency—cleaners, hospitality workers and others—who desperately need the cost of bills to come down. How will the projects announced today, and the other steps the Government are taking to counter the impact of uncertainty in global energy markets, help to stop people in Heywood and Middleton North being out of pocket?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is that this is about planning for the long term to get off the rollercoaster of fossil fuels, which are insecure. We saw what happened when Russia invaded Ukraine. Let me give the House one fact: if the Sizewell C plant had been up and running at the time of that crisis, bill payers would have saved £4 billion in 2022-23 alone. That is the security that new nuclear can give us.

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. I would like to ask the Secretary of State what guarantees are in place to ensure that these jobs go to local people rather than to overseas contractors? Also, what investment in training and skills will be provided to make sure that they go to local people on the ground?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point that Members on both sides of the House have raised in different ways. It is absolutely part of what we are going to do to make sure that these jobs come to the UK. There are commitments around 70% of the supply chain spending being in the UK, and my Department will ensure that there is accountability on the part of the companies that will be benefiting from public money, to ensure that we see the maximum benefits across the country in the UK.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's statement today. Unfortunately, it is not for viewers in Scotland. Scotland was once a pioneer in nuclear energy, and it should be again, but due to the SNP Scottish Government's outdated, backward and frankly bizarre opposition to nuclear energy, they are turning away billions of pounds of investment and

thousands of high-skilled jobs. Does he agree that this is yet another way that the SNP Scottish Government have lost their way?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is so right about this. People in Scotland will be looking at these announcements and saying, "Why isn't it us who are benefiting from this? Why are we not even in the race?" We have lots of Members saying that they want their area to benefit, yet the Scottish Government and the SNP are saying that they want no part of it, and no part of those jobs. That makes no sense.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I also welcome—*[Interruption.]* It is very unusual for me to welcome anything from the Secretary of State but I welcome this announcement, because nuclear is an important element in providing the baseload for electricity across the United Kingdom. He mentioned delivery five times in his statement, but this is an announcement not a delivery, and there is a period when we will still need the baseload to be provided. Can he tell us how he intends to ensure that the baseload is provided in that interim period, and what discussions he has had with the Economy Minister in Northern Ireland about the suitability of SMRs for supply in Northern Ireland?

Ed Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman and I have been discussing these energy issues for about 17 years since he was the spokesperson on this, and agreement is rare between us, so I really welcome what he says. I would say to him that these are the steps we have to go through to deliver, and they are incredibly important. To reassure him on his point about the Economy Minister in Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Energy Minister will be meeting them next week. We believe that this can benefit all four nations of the United Kingdom, and it is 100% our intention to make that happen.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. I welcome the Government's commitment to securing our future energy supply and, by doing so, taking control of our energy, protecting family finances and tackling the climate crisis. In addition, I am keen to learn about the Department's assessment of new technological developments to reduce energy waste, in particular through developing underground thermal energy storage solutions. I am aware of organisations in that sector that are keen to share opportunities with the Government, so what is the Secretary of State's assessment of the role of thermal storage solutions in reducing energy loss, avoiding curtailment fees and maximising the benefit from energy generated?

Ed Miliband: I know that my hon. Friend has been strongly advocating on these issues in terms of the exciting possibilities for his constituency. My suggestion is that a Minister from my Department—perhaps the Minister for Energy—should meet him and the company concerned about the potential involved.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The announcement today is good news as far as it goes, but the baseload that it will provide will not be on tap for many years to come. How does the Secretary of State propose to fill that gap? Will he now look again at

[Dr Andrew Morrison]

the UK-Morocco power project, which needs a decision soon and could be delivering electrons by the turn of the decade? Does the announcement today affect the likely contract for difference and strike prices eventually reached with the proposed operator?

Ed Miliband: We are looking seriously at the Xlinks project. The right hon. Gentleman is a tireless advocate for it, and I respect him for that. My answer on the baseload question is that we need a combination of things to meet the power that we need, and there are all kinds of different ways in which we can do that. I would also say that part of the job that we are undertaking is to make sure that we can get Hinkley Point C delivered as quickly as possible, because that can also make an important contribution. On his last point, the decisions today do not affect the decisions on Xlinks. Those are separate decisions.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): I welcome the statement today, which is moving towards an energy mix that is less weather dependent. I also welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of investment in nuclear fusion. There is one constant about nuclear fusion, which is that, starting from the original ideas in the 1950s, it has always been 50 years in the future. The International Energy Agency is still predicting that the earliest that nuclear fusion will be providing energy on to the grid will be the second half of this century. Does the Secretary of State agree with that, and if not, why not?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend is definitely right about the old saying on nuclear fusion. I think maybe it is coming a bit closer. There have been really important breakthroughs, particularly in the UK, and we are determined to invest in them. I do not think anyone can say for certain when it will arrive, but the prototype fusion project is a really exciting step on that journey.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Penblwydd hapus i chi, Mr Llefarydd—happy birthday to you, Mr Speaker. The nuclear community at Trawsfynydd remains disappointed not to be on GBN's SMR site and will continue to push for that and also for alternative uses. Security of supply of medical radioisotopes is critical to avoid the ethical nightmare of rationing diagnoses and treatments for a range of diseases including cancer. The Welsh Government's Project Arthur will see north Wales become the home of a public sector national laboratory to produce medical radioisotopes. What is the Secretary of State's Department doing to help the Welsh Government to realise Project Arthur at Trawsfynydd?

Ed Miliband: This is why these statements are important. I think I need to check the answer, because I do not want to give a flippant answer to the right hon. Lady's incredibly serious question. Let me write to her to give her a proper answer.

Lillian Jones (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. While I welcome this fantastic announcement, Scotland will unfortunately not benefit due to the SNP's ideological block on nuclear power, blocking billions in investment and thousands of well-paid

secure Scottish jobs and blocking growth across our Scottish communities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Scotland and, indeed, Ayrshire need a new political direction, and that the only way to get that will be at the ballot box next year?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it very well. I notice that SNP Members have sort of disappeared; they are probably a bit embarrassed. She is absolutely right about this. In a sense, it comes into sharp focus today because we can announce a golden age of nuclear with our investments, but not in Scotland because of the position of the SNP Government. It makes no sense.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. Energy security is important, so I welcome this investment in nuclear. One more small modular reactor can power a million homes using just two football pitches-worth of land, while solar needs 2,000 acres of good-quality farmland to power 50,000 homes. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider the importance of food security as well as energy security, reconsider the use of good-quality farmland for solar, and concentrate instead on producing nuclear?

Ed Miliband: We are operating under the previous Government's planning guidance when it comes to the best agricultural land. On the hon. Lady's wider point, we need all the clean energy resources that are at our disposal—solar, onshore and offshore wind, and nuclear. I am for all of the above.

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that the Government will make a statement later today to give an update on the middle east.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): Today's announcement that £2.5 billion will be invested in the small modular reactor programme is fantastic news for the country. It will help bring energy bills down, power homes and create jobs. It is amazing news for Derby, too, because the technology behind the SMRs has its roots in the technology developed at Rolls-Royce Submarines half a century ago. As the Government move forward with investment and delivery, and the Secretary of State approaches the contractual aspects, will he ensure that we build on what we have in Derby, such as the Nuclear Skills Academy, and the good jobs already there, so that we can grow opportunity for the wider region and the country as a whole?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it incredibly well. Derby should be incredibly proud of Rolls-Royce winning the competition, and incredibly excited about the possibilities for young people in Derby and across the wider region. Now we must ensure that, working with Rolls-Royce, we deliver on that promise, and that is what we intend to do.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): The hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) asked perfectly reasonable and pertinent questions about the cost of this whole project. Is there a private finance initiative element involved, and what will it cost? How ultimately will we dispose of the nuclear waste, and who will pay the decommissioning costs in 60 years' time? The nuclear industry does not have a great record on strike price, decommissioning costs or the cost of dealing with waste.

Ed Miliband: The right hon. Gentleman asks perfectly legitimate questions. I am glad to say that decommissioning is in at the beginning of the financing model, as part of the overall costs. We will lay out total costs when the final investment decision is made. Similarly, on the regulated asset base costs—I know that he genuinely cares about the climate crisis—all the evidence we have shows that this is our lowest-cost alternative, compared with other low-carbon technologies, so it is a crucial part of the energy mix.

Gurinder Singh Josan (Smethwick) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Labour Government on this incredibly important investment announcement. As a physicist by training, I particularly welcome the investment in fusion technology, as well as traditional fission. I am sure that this investment will bring closer the final outcome that we want. Will he ensure that the benefit of this investment is felt across all our communities by using a predominantly UK supply chain, and will he ensure that all aspects of the nuclear jigsaw receive Government support, including the provision of nuclear fuel, the decommissioning and safe disposal of nuclear waste, and even the reuse of currently stockpiled nuclear waste products in future generations of reactors?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend makes an important point: across the lifecycle of nuclear and across the supply chain, there are important economic opportunities. The importance of realising that potential is a constant theme of the questions that we have heard today, and that is what we intend to do.

Blake Stephenson (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): Global tech giants such as Microsoft and Amazon have announced plans to use SMRs to power their data centres, so they have trust in SMRs. I happen to believe that they should be the future of nuclear in this country. I have a couple of questions for the Secretary of State. The announcement states that a new public company, GB Energy Nuclear, will be set up. Will he set out why a new company is required, how much it will cost the public purse, and why it is based in Warrington? I have nothing against Warrington, of course, but why has the decision been made to place the company there? Will he outline when he expects meaningful deployment of the modular reactors?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman asks good questions. On the first, GB Energy Nuclear is a development of Great British Nuclear, which is based in Warrington. On deployment, I am aware of the record of people who promise deployment that is then not delivered, but the truth is that we expect a final investment decision in the next few years, and deployment in the early to mid-2030s—I think that is the fairest way of putting it. I agree with him about the potential. I also agree—this is why I have said that I am open to the role of the private sector—that private sector partners may want to come in and build sooner, and that would be great.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I welcome the investment in our energy security and jobs. I know from my visit to Sizewell with the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee that jobs in the nuclear industry are good, well paid and highly skilled. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is in

part thanks to the strong relationship between business, trade unions and the Government in that sector, and that there is much to be learned from that relationship in other parts of the energy sector and beyond?

Ed Miliband: My hon. Friend characteristically puts it incredibly well. The nuclear industry offers us a model of good employee relations, and there is a good, strong role for trade unions in ensuring safety and guaranteeing good terms and conditions for workers. That is a lesson that other parts of the energy industry, including the renewables sector, can definitely learn from.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): New jobs in clean energy are very welcome. Many of the skilled jobs at Hinkley Point C in the south-west are going to young people from beyond the area. Given the social mobility challenges in East Anglia and west Somerset, will the Secretary of State comment on investment in colleges and skills to encourage applications from the local area for those new jobs and apprenticeships?

Ed Miliband: The hon. Gentleman puts it incredibly well. That was certainly my impression when I went to Hinkley Point C, when I saw the impact that it has on the local economy. We want to do the same at Sizewell C. There are plans to start a local college, modelling in a way some of the stuff that was done at Hinkley Point C. He is so right about the massive opportunities here, which we must exploit.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): As a child, Sizewell was an important word to me, like Wylfa, Hunterston, Dungeness, Dounreay and Hinkley, because they were places where my father, based in Gateshead, went to work. Will the Secretary of State assure me that the announcement is part of bringing back those fantastic safe jobs, which are so important for Gateshead and the nuclear industry?

Ed Miliband: I am glad that my hon. Friend asks that question and talks about his heritage and family history. That reflects something real. The nuclear industry has a great tradition in this country. It went through a sort of extended hiccup, I think it is fair to say, but it is really important that we bring it back. Those are good, long-term secure jobs that people can take pride in. We should absolutely embrace that.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): As the chair of the all-party parliamentary groups on fusion energy and for the east midlands, I say a huge thank you on behalf of my constituents and my region for the two major announcements: Rolls-Royce winning the SMR contract, and the £2.5 billion for fusion energy. Does the Secretary of State agree that such large infrastructure projects offer huge apprenticeship opportunities for my region, and will he commit to meeting me and the Mayor of the East Midlands, Claire Ward, to discuss how the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station can play its role?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his two-hatted advocacy on these issues. He makes an important point. The potential of the new prototype fusion plant is huge, as is the wider potential of nuclear. I look forward to discussing that with him.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and the clear positivity in every word he has said. I very much welcome the news that nuclear energy is to be secured for the United Kingdom, bringing job security and many contracts, and we look forward to seeing how we can all benefit across this great nation. Can he confirm that companies from the United Kingdom will be able to secure contracts to supply materials and manpower? How can Government ensure that each area of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will benefit from this massive investment?

Ed Miliband: It is really important that there is a four-nations approach to the supply chain contracts; that is something I am very keen to ensure. There will be thousands of contracts in the supply chain, with huge opportunities for Northern Ireland, and I am determined to deliver them.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): Andy Burnham's Atom Valley mayoral development zone for advanced manufacturing will be based in Rochdale, Oldham and Bury, and it is so named in honour of Ernest Rutherford's groundbreaking research at the University of Manchester on splitting the atom. Does my right hon. Friend welcome the fact that today's huge public investment in both nuclear and nuclear fusion will rely on precisely the kind of cutting-edge research that will be done at the Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre in Rochdale?

Ed Miliband: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that question and on the new centre, which is incredibly appropriately named. We should celebrate our history on these issues, and the way to honour our history is by building the future for nuclear—that is what today is all about.

Point of Order

1.41 pm

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have given the Speaker's Office advance sight of this point of order on process, following proceedings last night in relation to new clause 82 tabled to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which was not put for a separate decision. First, I want to say very clearly that this is no criticism or challenge of the decision of the Clerks, Deputy Chairs or Chairs, for whom I have immense respect, but it is a request for clarification on the process and the decision that was come to last night. With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask the following.

New clause 82 was accepted for a separate decision yesterday, and it was signed by over 70 Members of Parliament. The Member who tabled the new clause, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Tom Hayes), had indicated outside the Chamber before the conclusion of the proceedings that he would not push the new clause to a vote, and that is his right. However, advice was given to the Chair that the Chair has discretion not to mention or put the Question at the conclusion of proceedings, despite the new clause being allocated for separate decision through the usual channels; thus, when the conclusion of proceedings came, there was no mention of new clause 82.

Precedent in this House says that another Member who has signed the amendment can push the new clause to a vote. However, that option was not given to a Member who wished to do so and had signed the amendment. "Erskine May" states under paragraph 28.139, titled "Conclusion of proceedings on consideration":

"If the time available for debate on consideration under the terms of a programme order has been exhausted, Standing Order No 83E is engaged. In order to bring proceedings to a conclusion, the Speaker must put forthwith the following questions (but no others):

- a. any question already proposed from the Chair;
- b. any question necessary to bring to a decision a question so proposed;
- c. the question on any amendment, new clause or new schedule selected by the Speaker for separate decision;
- d. the question on any amendment moved or motion made by a Minister; and
- e. any other question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded."

Another example comes in Standing Order No. 32, which says in sub-clause (1):

"In respect of any motion or any bill under consideration on report or any Lords amendment to a bill, the Speaker shall have power to select the amendments, new clauses or new schedules to be proposed thereto."

Sub-clause (5) states:

"The powers conferred on the Speaker by this order shall not be exercised by the Deputy Speaker save during the consideration of the estimates."

I have a concern that this has set a precedent. Over 70 Members across the House who had signed a new clause did not have the chance to put it to a vote last night. The Member who tabled the clause spoke to it and outlined the measures that it would bring into the legislation. I am worried that Members from all parties across the House who have signed amendments and

new clauses will not have the opportunity to put them to a vote just because the Chair decides they have the discretion to eradicate that Question from being put in the proceedings of this House. I would be grateful for your clarification, Madam Deputy Speaker, and maybe you could offer a meeting with the Principal Clerk, so that I can discuss my concerns about this issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I thank the hon. Member for advance notice of his point of order. I can assure him and the House that nothing irregular or, indeed, unusual took place last night. It is usual for the Speaker to give provisional advance notice of amendments and new clauses that are expected to be selected for separate decision. However, it is not infrequent for the Chair to make changes based on new information that comes to light during the course of the debate, particularly when the lead signatory to an amendment or new clause indicates that they do not wish to move it.

Only an amendment or new clause that has been moved by a Member needs to be withdrawn with the leave of the House before the Question is put. This only applies to the lead amendment or new clause in any group. In this instance, the Member had not been called to move the new clause, so there was nothing to withdraw. It is wholly appropriate and normal for the Chair to decide not to call a new clause or amendment for a separate decision when the lead signatory has indicated they do not wish to move it. Ideally, this indication should have been made in the course of the debate by the Member who tabled the new clause. The hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) knows very well how to touch base with the Table Clerks and the staff in the Speaker's Office.

BILL PRESENTED

BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY (SOVEREIGNTY AND CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Priti Patel, supported by Andrew Rosindell, Wendy Morton, James Cartlidge, Mr Mark Francois, Helen Grant, Jesse Norman, Alex Burghart, Andrew Griffith, Sir Mel Stride, Mr Richard Holden and Mike Wood, presented a Bill to make provision about sovereignty and constitutional arrangements in respect of the British Indian Ocean Territory, also known as the Chagos Archipelago; to prohibit the making of payments of public funds to the government of another country in connection with the sovereignty or constitutional arrangements of the British Indian Ocean Territory, unless authorised by Parliament; to require the Secretary of State to consult and engage with British Chagossians in relation to any proposed changes to the sovereignty and constitutional arrangements of the British Indian Ocean Territory; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 June, and to be printed (Bill 258).

Freedom of Expression (Religion or Belief System)

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

1.47 pm

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about freedom of expression in relation to religion or belief systems; and for connected purposes.

I do not believe that Mohammed was a Prophet sent by God. I do not accept the instructions he said he received from the Archangel Gabriel. I do not accept that the Sunna, or body of Islamic laws, has any relevance to me. I respect the religious beliefs of others, but I do not mind if Mohammed is satirised, criticised or mocked. I am not a Muslim, and I choose not to live by the moral codes set out by Islam. I am a Christian, and I should make it clear that I do not think anybody should be prosecuted for satirising, criticising or mocking Jesus either.

England and Wales abolished blasphemy laws in 2008, and Scotland abolished them in 2021, but even then, those laws had not been used for decades. The last blasphemy trial took place in 1977, and the state has not brought a public prosecution for blasphemy in more than a century, but now, blasphemy laws are back. I have been advised not to refer to two high-profile cases of people being arrested, charged and prosecuted for causing harassment, alarm or distress to Muslims or even, nonsensically, to Islam itself. While I will keep my speech to the conceptual, I invite the House to recall that there are real examples of what I raise in the criminal justice system right now.

The issue is the way that sections 4 and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 are being used—far beyond the intent of Parliament—to police what we can and cannot say about Islam. I will come to the details of sections 4 and 5, but first I want to say something about the intent of the Public Order Act. The long title of the Act makes it clear that its purpose was to abolish some common law and statutory offences to make way for new offences relating to public order. Nowhere in the Second Reading debate from 1986 did anybody raise the need to protect religions or followers of religions from offence. The context of the Act was football hooliganism and the riots in Brixton and Broadwater Farm.

It is true that part III of the Act created new offences relating to racial hatred, and this was amended to include religious hatred by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. However, section 29J of the Public Order Act, to which we will return, says:

“Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents”.

We can therefore be confident that the Public Order Act, even as amended, was never intended to become a blasphemy law.

That obvious conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the controversies regarding blasphemy and Islam in this country began two years after its introduction, in 1988, with the publication of “The Satanic Verses”. Since that year, and the protests and fatwa against Sir Salman

[Nick Timothy]

Rushdie, our public conversation about Islam has been limited through a mixture of self-censorship and more official restrictions, such as the definition of Islamophobia accepted by many public bodies. These restrictions are motivated not by a desire to avoid offence—consider the criticism and mockery made of other religions—but by fear of a violent response by those who are offended.

Some say public order offences are not the same as a blasphemy law, and that it can be legitimate to prosecute somebody for saying something that might cause wider disorder. Perhaps in some circumstances that may be so, but we should interrogate this line of thinking. First, the Crown Prosecution Service gave the game away by charging one man with causing “distress” to the “religious institution of Islam”, which is pretty much the dictionary definition of blasphemy. Secondly, twisting the law to make a protestor responsible for the violent reaction of those who will not tolerate the opinions of others is wrong; it destroys our freedom of speech. Some argue that although this may be regrettable, it is now an unavoidable consequence of the multicultural society in which we live today.

By this logic, the state must police the boundaries between different ethnic and religious groups to avoid disorder, but we should be clear that that means state intrusion and a loss of liberty on some occasions, and mob rule on others. This is the very essence of the two-tier policing row we have seen recently: rough justice for those belonging to identity groups that play by the rules, and freedom from justice for those belonging to groups willing to take to the streets and threaten violence. This is the logic of using the Public Order Act to prohibit us from saying what we like about a religion. A person may be found guilty because of the violent reaction of those offended by their actions.

From Sir Salman Rushdie to the Batley teacher still in hiding with his family, the threat of violence is what lies behind these new blasphemy laws. Perhaps we should not be surprised. There are at least 14 Muslim-majority countries where the penalty for blasphemy or apostasy is death, and we have significant diaspora populations from many of them. With the number of people here who came from those countries growing and the increasing

assertiveness of organised political Islam in Britain, this is a problem that seems likely only to get more severe. But the answer is not to surrender to the mob; it is to hold the line, and that is why today I bring forward this Bill.

I said earlier that section 29J of the Public Order Act protects “criticism”, “insult” and even “abuse” of “religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents”.

However, that applies only to part III of the legislation, because part III introduced offences relating to racial hatred, later amended to include religious hatred. Nobody thought sections 4 and 5, which in part I of the Act make it an offence to cause “harassment, alarm or distress” by using

“threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour”

would be used to criminalise the expression of opinions about religious belief.

This Bill would therefore extend the scope of section 29J to the whole Public Order Act—thus preventing the use of sections 4 and 5 as a de facto blasphemy law—and would apply section 29J also to section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 and section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988. In so doing, this Bill would restore free speech as it applies to religion in England and Wales. It would stop the police, prosecutors and judges from creating a blasphemy law from legislation that was never passed for that purpose. It would send the strongest powerful message from this place, where political power legitimately and democratically resides, that this country will not tolerate intimidation, violence or censorship, that there will be no special treatment here for Islam, and that there will be no surrender to the thugs who want to impose their beliefs and culture on the rest of us.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Nick Timothy, John Cooper, Dr Luke Evans, Mr Richard Holden, Robert Jenrick, Rupert Lowe, Rebecca Paul, Jack Rankin, Sir Alec Shelbrooke, Bradley Thomas, Tom Tugendhat and Sir Gavin Williamson present the Bill.

Nick Timothy accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July, and to be printed (Bill 257).

Data (Use and Access) Bill [Lords]

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I inform the House that nothing in the Lords Message engages Commons financial privilege.

Before Clause 138

STATEMENT AND BRINGING FORWARD OF A DRAFT BILL: COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT, AI MODELS, AND TRANSPARENCY OVER INPUTS

1.56 pm

The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant): I beg to move,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 49F and proposes, in lieu of the Lords Amendment, amendment (a) to Commons amendment 45, amendments (b), (c) and (d) to Commons amendment 46 and amendment (e) to the Bill.

I fear it is an inevitable aspect of ping-pong that there is a degree of repetitiveness about our proceedings. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), said last week that it reminded him of the film “Groundhog Day”, but that refers to the Pennsylvania Dutch superstition that if a groundhog emerges from its burrow on 2 February and sees its own shadow, it will retreat to its den and winter will go on for six more weeks. Well, I can see my shadow and I just hope that ping-pong is not going to continue for another six weeks.

Last week, I covered some misconceptions about the contents of the Bill and what we are trying to achieve separately in relation to artificial intelligence and copyright. I fear that some of those misconceptions persist. The Guardian carried the following sentence this weekend:

“The AI Bill, which proposes allowing tech companies to use copyrighted material, has suffered a fifth defeat in the Lords.” That was repeated by one of the presenters on the “Today” programme, who stated that the Bill allows AI companies to use copyright material. I am glad the “Today” programme has apologised and corrected the record. Let me reiterate: this is not an AI Bill and it does not propose changing copyright in any regard whatsoever. If the Bill goes forward in the way proposed by the Government, there will be no diminution in the robustness of the UK copyright regime. Sometimes I want to say, in the words of Richard II, “you have mistook us all this while.”

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): I accept what he said at the start of his speech, but the industry is desperate: its intellectual property is being stolen day by day, and the Minister does understand that it wants a timeline and a vehicle. I hope he will confirm that the Government are going to bring one forward.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Gentleman knows that I am not going to do that. He also knows that the enforcement of copyright law is not a matter for Government because it is not the Government who enforce it. I have the enforcement regulations in my hand. Chapter VI of the Copyright, Designs and Patents

Act 1988 makes it very clear that infringement is actionable by copyright owners. In common with many bits of the law and with statute law in the UK, enforcement is not normally by Government. It is by either the prosecuting authorities or by people taking a civil action. Those are the measures that exist in copyright law today and we are not changing them in a single regard. Having said all that, I acknowledge the strong feelings expressed in both Houses about the need to protect the intellectual property rights of 2.4 million people who work in the creative industries in this country, including the significant proportion of the creative industries represented by the tech industries, which this week are celebrating London Tech Week.

It must be said that their lordships have been persistent, so much so that they remind me of a poem by Robert Browning, “A Toccata of Galuppi’s”, about the 18th century Venetian composer Baldassare Galuppi. It uses several musical terms, such as the dominant, and includes the line:

“Hark, the dominant’s persistence till it must be answered to!”

The Lords have been persistent, which is why we have not just listened to them; we have heard them, and we are answering them. Although the Bill, which was drafted largely by the previous Government, did not originally refer to the matter of copyright at all, that is why at a previous stage we tabled specific requirements on the Government to produce an economic impact assessment of the options available to us and to report on key issues, including transparency, technical solutions, access to data and copyright licensing within 12 months.

In response to their lordships, we are going several steps further. First, we are adding two further reporting requirements on approaches to models trained overseas and on how transparency and other requirements should be enforced. Secondly, in response to the call for us to work faster—meeting the point just made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Sir Julian Smith)—we will deliver the economic impact assessment and reports within nine months, rather than 12 months. Thirdly, we are introducing a new requirement that the Secretary of State make a progress statement to Parliament about the documents within six months of Royal Assent.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The Minister is being generous, as always, in giving way. I welcome the amendments—I think they are helpful and useful—but they miss out and exclude transparency, which is what this is all about. The Lords, the creative sector and artists around this country want a commitment that this Government will deal with issues of transparency. Why will the Minister not sit down and compromise with the House of Lords and ensure that we get a solution that works for everybody?

Chris Bryant: In the end, the single most important compromise will be between the AI sector and the creative industries sector. That is the bit that we need to negotiate over the next few months. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the idea of simply putting one part of the jigsaw into this Bill. The truth is that if we are going to get to a proper compromise solution, it will require all the bits of the jigsaw to be put together into a comprehensive picture. That means that we need to go through a proper process.

[Chris Bryant]

The last time we discussed these things, the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) referred to the noble Lord Peter Mandelson and amendments that he thought were tabled to deal with Napster in the Digital Economy Act 2010. Because I had some spare time over the weekend, I read all the debates on that Act in 2010, and we went through a process to get to that Act: we produced a White Paper and then legislation, which went through both Houses. It was introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Mandelson and in the House of Commons by Ben Bradshaw. In fact, most of that Act was so controversial that in the end, it was never implemented by the Government who took over in 2010, and large chunks of the Act were taken out when it collided with the 2010 general election.

I am not sure that things were quite as the hon. Gentleman thought at the time, but the key point is that we need to go through a proper process of bringing forward conciliation in this area. That means introducing legislation once we have considered the responses to the consultation, bringing forward our economic impact assessments, considering all the different aspects that really matter to the creative industries and the tech companies, and then considering legislation. I want to do that as fast as we possibly can, because I want to get to a solution for all of this problem.

The Government have tabled amendments to put these commitments in the Bill. The amendments were initially tabled in the other place, but they were not voted on by peers, who instead insisted on the amendment that we disagreed to last Tuesday—in fact, as I understand it, the amendments were not moved. They show our commitment to ensuring considered and effective solutions, as I have outlined, and demonstrate that we have unequivocally heard the concerns about timing and accountability.

We need to do one other piece of work. The House already knows that we will bring together working groups to consider transparency and technical solutions. They will have AI and creative industry representatives on them and will be extra-parliamentary.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): I thank the Minister for being so generous with his time. On that point, will he outline how the Government will decide which parliamentarians will be on the advisory group and how they will be chosen?

Chris Bryant: I am about to come to that—my hon. Friend has a faster timeline than I have. There is of course expertise in Parliament, which is why I commit today that the Government will convene a series of meetings to keep interested parliamentarians informed on progress on this important issue, so that we can benefit from their input as we develop our thinking before any formal proposals are brought back to Parliament.

The working group meetings will include a cross-party group of Members, made up of MPs and peers. We hope that the group can act as an informal sounding board, but it is not intended to replicate or replace the normal scrutiny role of established bodies, such as Select Committees. I see that the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for

Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), is in her dutiful place as usual; I would not dream of seeking to tell her Committee what to do or how to conduct its business, but we would none the less like to be able to draw on its members and their expertise.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Chris Bryant: I thought that might happen.

Dame Meg Hillier: Late on Friday night—after hours and to an unmonitored inbox—emails suggesting that approach were sent to the Chairs of the two relevant Select Committees: the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. That was the first that had been heard of it. An all-colleague email went round on Saturday morning. This seems to be rather hurried, breathless and not very courteous to the House. The Minister has written two very respected books about Parliament, and I am sure that he did not intend disrespect, but we need to be clear that scrutiny is done through Select Committees and that policymaking is a separate thing. Combining the two is not really appropriate.

Chris Bryant: I completely agree with the last point that my hon. Friend makes. Scrutiny of Government legislation through the proper processes in either this House or the other House—or through Select Committees, for that matter, which do it in a slightly different way—is one thing, and the business of developing policy is another. I completely apologise for the inadvertent sending of the email to the wrong address and all the rest of it.

We are simply trying to engage as many Members in this House and the other House as we possibly can, on a matter that clearly matters to a great number of Members of Parliament because of their constituents. That includes my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), who I know has a very large creative community in her own constituency. We want to involve as many people as we possibly can. We may be moving faster on occasions than people want, but sometimes the demand is that we move faster. I apologise for the inadvertent discourtesy, but we are simply trying to engage as many people in the future debate as we possibly can.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Chris Bryant: Before I do, I will say that because my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch is the Chair of the Liaison Committee, I wonder if it would be useful if she and I met in the next few days with the Chairs of the two most relevant Committees to discuss precisely what shape all that should take and what would be useful and informative, rather than doing anything that might undermine the process.

Chris Vince: The Minister partly answered my question as he went along there. My thought on the group is that it is really important that we get creative voices into the room to have that conversation. Once the group is formed, will part of its remit be to invite members of the creative industry in to discuss their concerns and how we can work together to solve them?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Before the Minister responds, I remind him that we have only an hour for the whole debate. We have four Back Benchers wishing to contribute.

Chris Bryant: I feel told off, Madam Deputy Speaker, but thank you very much. I have been told off for talking too long, for talking too short, for going too fast and for going too slow.

My point is that we are already committed to creating two working groups that will look at transparency and at technical solutions to the problems that we face. Both of them will have members of the creative industries and members of tech and AI companies engaged in them. In addition, we want to have a separate group of Members of this House and the other House who are engaged with and have an interest in the subject to help us to develop these policy areas. I think it is best to keep those separate, and that is the plan. As we know, the Secretary of State has already written to the Chairs of the relevant Select Committees, but I hope that what I have just said is helpful.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con) *indicated assent.*

Chris Bryant: I see that I am getting a slight nod from the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee about the prospect of our meeting to sort out a way forward on that.

I will say a few words about ping-pong. Some peers have suggested that different rules apply because the Bill started in the Lords. That is simply not true. Double insistence would kill the Bill wherever the Bill had started, and I take people at their word when they say that they do not want to kill the Bill. It has important measures that will enable digital verification services, the national underground asset register and smart data schemes to grow the economy; that will save NHS time; that will make vital amendments to our policing laws; and that will support the completion of the EU's adequacy review. Its provisions have the support of all parties in both Houses, which is why I urge this House to accept our amendments in lieu and urge the Lords not to insist on their amendment but to agree with us.

It is worth pointing out that if their lordships do persist, they are not just delaying and imperilling a Bill that all parties agree is an important and necessary piece of legislation; they are imperilling something of much greater significance and importance economically: our data adequacy with the European Union. The successful renewal of our EU adequacy decisions is predicated on us having settled law as soon as possible, and we will not have that until the Bill gains Royal Assent. I cannot overemphasise how important this is, and I am absolutely mystified as to why the Liberal Democrats—of all parties—would want to imperil that.

I am equally mystified by the position of the Conservative party. They tabled amendments in the Commons Committee and Report stages that are almost exactly mirrored by what we have already added to the Bill and are adding today. I very much hope therefore that the Conservative party will agree to our motion. It is not as if it disagrees with any of the measures in the Bill.

I am grateful to the noble Baroness Kidron, who said in the Lords,

"I want to make it absolutely clear that, whatever transpires today, I will accept the choice the Government make."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 June 2025; Vol. 846, c. 755.]

It was a point she reiterated later in the debate when she said,

"if we"

—that is, the Lords—

"choose to vote on this and successfully pass it, I will accept anything that the Commons does... I will not stand in front of your Lordships again and press our case."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 June 2025; Vol. 846, c. 773.]

The noble Baroness is right. In the end, only one House is elected; only one House constitutes the Government of the day; and, especially where a Bill was adumbrated in a general election as this one was, the unelected House treads carefully. That is all the more important when the governing party has barely a fifth of the members of the other House. We have listened to the other House and taken action. There may be disagreements about the measures we have taken, but it would be wrong to say that we have not listened. It is time for the Houses to agree that the Bill must go forward.

I will say one final word about creativity. We live in an exceptional age. When our parents were young, they were lucky if their family had a television or a record player. They might occasionally go to a gig, concert or play. If they did have a television, they had a choice of just two or three channels. By contrast, today we are surrounded by human creativity in a way that no other generation was. Technology has brought us multiple channels where we can pick and choose whatever we want, whenever we want to see it. We watch more drama than ever. We can listen to our own choice of music on the train, on the bus or in the car. We can play games online with friends on the other side of the world. More books are published than ever. We can read or listen to them. Almost twice as many people went to the theatre last year as went to a premier league match. There are many challenges, all of which we need to address, including that of the interaction of AI with human creativity, but creativity is a quintessence of our humanity. It requires human-to-human connection, and I do not think for a single instant that that will change.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): It feels like we are going from "Groundhog Day" to "Lost in Translation" because the Government clearly are not getting the message.

Today I will try something different and tell the House a story—the story of this debate:

A story was read in the deep dark wood,

AI saw the book, and the book looked good.

"Where are you heading to, original tome?"

Come here with me, and I'll give you a home."

"That's awfully sweet of you, but no,

I'm meeting my author, and they say where I go.

Now I like you, and I don't want to cause strife

But they made me with love and words shaped by life.

So if we're to partner, please do ask them first,

To not would be naughty," he said with lips pursed.

[Dr Ben Spencer]

Perhaps I owe Julia Donaldson an apology, while also thanking her for the national treasure that is “The Gruffalo”—I look forward to the third book in the series. We did not use AI, which was useless, to draft it, just the skills of one of my team members Jacqui Gracey—human skill, talent and transparency over sources and work.

Transparency is fundamental to protect creative endeavours. No one can doubt that the Minister has done his best to demonstrate the enduring nature of the creative spirit in the face of adversity and to avoid committing to a timescale and to legislating on transparency. This week, it is a new parliamentary working group. Last week, it was reviews. Next week, it may even be a citizens’ assembly, but the creative industries are not buying it. Our noble colleagues in the other place are not buying it. Members of Opposition parties, and indeed some Members on his own Benches, are not buying it. They are not buying it because the Government have lost the confidence of their stakeholders that they would bring forward legislation to enact effective and proportionate transparency requirements for AI models in the use of their creative content—AI companies need to buy it.

It is this loss of confidence in the Government’s will to take decisive action that means that nothing short of a commitment to bring forward legislation will be enough to allay the fears of the creative industries.

2.15 pm

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for his creativity in his speech. The heart of the debate is whether creatives are asked before we steal their material or style, but also that they are remunerated for that. That is a commitment we have heard from the Minister and from the Secretary of State in his media performances on the weekend. This problem predates this year. It dates back to stuff being stolen over a considerable number of years. Why did the last Government not take any initiative to ensure that creatives receive their just rewards for their creativity?

Dr Spencer: What the last Government did not do is release a consultation that had a ministerial foreword to say that the position of copyright was uncertain. What they did not do was say their preferred option was opt-out, which spooked the creative industry and caused all these problems in the first place. It is this Government’s ham-fisted approach that caused so many of the problems that they are now trying and failing to fix. The Government have played a large part in creating this problem.

Pete Wishart: I am not going to let the hon. Gentleman get away with that. The last Government did not do anything on this issue, basically because they did not understand what was going on, and the little they did understand about some of the threats from AI, they did not care. As he asked the Labour Benches to do yesterday, the hon. Gentleman should apologise for the last Government’s inaction over the past few years because a lot of this is down to them.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Will the hon. Member give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Perhaps the hon. Lady should allow the hon. Member to respond to the first intervention before he takes a second.

Dr Spencer: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said, this is clearly a tricky area to legislate—I have said that at the Dispatch Box and in Committee many times—but what is not helping is the uncertainty that has been created throughout the debate, whether it is the position of copyright law, preferred third options or the status of opt-out, which is how we got into this pickle in the first place.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: There seems to be mass amnesia breaking out across the Chamber because the last Government did do something on this: they set up a working group between AI companies and the creative industries.

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle): They cancelled it.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: No, the AI companies walked away. We are almost at risk of recreating history by this Government wanting to set up exactly the same working group and thinking that by doing the same thing again, the outcome will somehow be different.

Dr Spencer: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee, who is also trying to break us out of the groundhog day that we seem to have found ourselves in.

The Lords amendment does not fetter the Government’s policy options, nor does it prescribe how proportionate transparency should be achieved. It simply puts a line in the sand for the Government to act on this hugely important issue.

To return to the AI and the Gruffalo,
So on went the story through the deep dark wood
To be loved by its readers, as a good book should.
Yet the AI pondered, as it wanted it now.
“I’ll simply just scrape it”, the AI did avow.
When he was musing, he stumbled across
The author reclining on a patch of green moss.
They had glasses and notebooks and ideas galore.
They had printed five books, but were working on more.
Their eyes came to meet—they were in for a fight.
Both wanted the story, but who was right?
The answer is both, if reasonably sought
For content, not stolen, but licensed or bought.
Be clear what you’re taking, be transparent and true,
And recognise the content and its real value.
Then there’s no monster nor bad guy, just an allegorical rhyme
And a plea to listen and take action in time.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I hope that the shadow Minister sought permission to misappropriate Julia Donaldson’s wonderful work. It is hardly an example that any of us should follow.

We are back here again. I put on record my thanks to Government Front Benchers for their engagement on this issue. It was particularly welcome to see the Secretary of State, in his appearance on “Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg”, take such a human approach to recognising

the concern that exists in the creative industries and give a commitment to the nation about the seriousness of what comes from this place.

I also welcome the Minister's comments that the creative and tech sectors will be involved in the next phase of this work, because that is essential. However, I would like to stress two further points. First, that involvement must reflect the breadth of the creative industries, from music and publishing to games, film and beyond—the necessary mix of expertise. That means the creative sector rights holders and business affairs professionals being involved, alongside the tech experts who understand the complexities of data flows, metadata structures, and the practicalities of any opt-out system or tech solution that is to be developed, notwithstanding the Secretary of State's clarification that the Government no longer have a preferred position.

We look forward to the consultation and its findings being open and transparent, because while all the creative sectors share in the value of copyright as a principle that is tech and sector neutral, the way that commercial licensing models develop in practice will differ, and it is not for the Government to second-guess that. That is not a problem; in fact, it is a good thing. The emergence of bespoke commercial partnerships is precisely how the Government can achieve their objective of driving effective licensing, but to get there, we need sector-specific insight and specialist input, not a one-size-fits-all approach. I welcome the commitment to include Back Benchers, stakeholders and leaders of industry.

Crucially, the Government must consult and liaise with all of us on the formation of these groups, including their terms of reference—this cannot be presented again as a fait accompli. Too often, we hear of officials thinking or mulling things over, but not sharing what those thoughts are or what the implications of their latest thought could be. With the best will in the world, they cannot know the business as clearly as industry does. I believe that the prospects for both industries have improved as a result of this ping-pong process and the arguments we have been having, both in this House and in the other place.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): My hon. Friend says that the prospects for both industries have improved. I have spoken in this place about my previous role as a screenwriter—I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—and this week, the British Film Institute reported that AI threatens the British film industry, with over 130,000 scripts having been plundered. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we fail to take this opportunity to deal with transparency and put powers to legislate on the face of the Bill, we will be leaving screenwriters and other creatives high and dry until we legislate in the future?

Mr Frith: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, which as ever is rooted in the first-hand experience and professional success that brought her to this place. She should be listened to, and her warnings about the implications of not taking transparency seriously should be heeded.

Secondly, I will return to a subject that I have raised before, because it warrants more scrutiny. That is the recurring suggestion that copyright is out of date. On the one hand, we have heard the Government talk

about copyright being clear and well established, and of course we agree with that. Only this weekend, the Government clarified again that if no licence or permission is in place, that is theft or piracy. That clarity is precisely what gives rights holders the confidence, control and legal basis to license their works, which the Government also rightly want to encourage.

However, in the same spirit, we sense that the Government still feel that copyright somehow needs to be reformed or ignored. I ask the Minister to take what I hope is the last opportunity during this process to indicate exactly what reform is being proposed, and what it will achieve that copyright does not already do, because the creative industry believes copyright to be best in class as a respected and enforceable measure. If the answer is transparency, personality rights, or anything that sits around copyright rather than within it, let us call that what it is, but can we please avoid vagueness, constructive ambiguity, and language that sets hares running or undermines confidence in what is frankly a best-in-class system?

Finally, if the Government are still entertaining the idea that the stability of UK copyright law could be weakened in pursuit of an idea of innovation, many will feel that the shift in tone and position in recent weeks—which has been deeply welcome—has been counter-productive, and they will be left concerned.

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

Victoria Collins (Harpden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I would like to either disappoint or reassure the House that, sadly, I do not have a story for Members today. I will dive straight into the amendments that are before us.

Just three months. After all the discussions and the cries for fairness from the creative industries, which have seen the daylight robbery of their life's work, the Government are sending back an amendment that, in essence, changes the economic assessment from 12 months to nine months, with a progress statement and some expansion. I understand that this is the data Bill, and that this legislation contains many important elements relating to the future of our data, which we must secure. In response to the point made by the Minister, I absolutely understand the importance of securing data adequacy with the European Union. However, the creative industry is at a critical juncture with AI. Many feel that it is already too late, but they are doing what they can, fighting for transparency and fairness for a £126 billion UK industry.

The Creators' Rights Alliance has already started to see the impact for creators. 58% of members of the Association of Photographers have lost commissioned work to generative AI services, with an increase of 21% in the past five months alone, totalling an average loss of £14,400 per professional photographer—approximately £43 million in total. Some 32% of illustrators report losing work to AI, with an average loss of £9,262 per affected UK creator. There is an uncomfortable truth that economic gains from AI—of which I am sure there will be many—will also be met with economic losses that must be addressed. Indeed, at Old Street tube station, there are signs everywhere at the moment saying “Stop hiring humans.” Some 77% of authors do not

[Victoria Collins]

know whether their work has been used to train AI, 71% are concerned about AI mimicking their style without consent, and 65% of fiction writers and 57% of non-fiction writers believe that AI will negatively impact their future earnings. At this point, the creative industry feels betrayed, and is asking for solutions.

I also welcome the Secretary of State's statements this weekend. He talked about looking comprehensively at the challenges creatives will face into the future and about bringing legislation in at the right time, but that time is now. Last week's Lords amendment 49F highlighted that the Lords understood the need for separate legislation and asked for a draft Bill looking at copyright infringement, AI and transparency about inputs, which is something that creatives have been clear about from the start. I have always highlighted the positive impacts of technology and innovation, and I have no doubt that creatives will also use AI to aid their creativity. However, from musicians to film makers and photographers to writers and painters, the works of this massive industry have been swallowed up, and creatives are left wondering what that means for them—especially as they are already starting to see the impact.

In my constituency of Harpenden and Berkhamsted I see the creative spirit everywhere. There is: Open Door, a caring oasis with walls covered by local artists; the Harpenden Photographic Society, established more than 80 years ago, where generations have learned to capture light and moment through their lens; the Berkhamsted art society, where painters and craftspeople gather to nurture each other's artistic journey; and the Berkhamsted Jazz group, who get us up and dancing. These creators are the threads that weave the rich tapestry of British culture, and the creative industries permeate our towns, including the filming of box office hits such as "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" at Ashridge. Who will be the guardians of this creative galaxy? Why does this theft feel a little less heroic than Robin Hood?

2.30 pm

What is more, AI is also a business opportunity. Having spoken to the UK industry and businesses actively seeking to adopt AI solutions, they are also looking for transparency for their due diligence. BT serves around 1 million small business customers, and it sees a big opportunity to better serve them with AI solutions, but it says that transparency would help them do so with confidence. With the working groups with creatives and AI, we should also bring in the wider industry to unlock the opportunities.

From businesses to creators, the Bill should be seen as an opportunity for the economy. Creators are asking for something reasonable: partnership, not appropriation. They want to be asked, not simply taken from. As we all vote today, I urge Members to keep that in mind. It is a bittersweet irony that this week in Parliament there is a display celebrating the art of Parliament. There are more than 10,000 pieces of work in the archives, from Adebajni Alade to Céline Baumann. They tell the story of our democracy, culture and country. I was struck by one of the latest acquisitions, "The Magic Hour" by Katharine LiBretto. It is a bewitching screenprint that has the silhouette of Parliament. I hope that now is that

magic hour, when the Government can find a way forward to value creatives and set a new path for the future.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): I draw the attention of the House to my being the founder of Labour: Women in Tech and the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on financial technology, and to my career in data and technology prior to becoming an MP. I welcome the Government's new approach to innovate and expedite the process and to leverage the expertise of both Houses and key stakeholders. I thank them for their work on that.

Just under a month ago, the UK hosted FinTech Week and the global fintech forum, where businesses and Government leaders from around the world came to participate in critical conversations about the importance of the trusted global financial services ecosystem for the physical and digital worlds. Attendance was so senior and strong because after the global financial crisis the UK had to move quickly to a new model, and hence fintech was born. A lot of great work was done in this space by the Conservatives when they were in government, even if they could not get their act together over AI and keep the attention of AI companies. Government regulators, incumbents, entrepreneurs and investors worked together with alacrity to create an ecosystem that led the world into fintech. We created tens of thousands of new jobs, brought in tens of millions in inward investment and created more than 20 billion-dollar companies.

We are in the middle of London Tech Week, which is happening a few miles away at Olympia and was attended by the Prime Minister. There is a technology challenge in the creative industries that needs addressing now, which is why it is great to hear the news today. This is an emergency, and the emergence of AI in recent times has created opportunity and new threats for creatives, who rightly worry that their work is often appropriated by AI without reward or recognition. However, we can be a pioneer in this field, developing trusted solutions that protect creatives and set the standards that others will follow. We have demonstrated our ability to do that in the past with fintech, in which the UK holds a 10% global market share.

The UK's secret sauce is a unique blend of not just our brilliant talent, light-touch regulation, common business language and soft power, but our common law, which is used by other countries. We are an exemplar. Other countries look to us to lead the way. A crisis is at the door, but we have an opportunity to be on the front foot, ahead of other countries experiencing the same challenges and watching us closely. This country always steps up in times of crisis. The UK can and must take a leading position on the fair use of AI in the creative industries and help to protect our creatives and their work, which are rightly celebrated across the world.

Engagement with global players in the ecosystem is important, but we should also be far more focused on the UK's home-grown talent and inventive mindset to solve the biggest puzzles. We can move quickly when we need to, and my message to the Secretary of State and to this House is that we really need to, and have to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: First, I thank the Secretary of State for sending our Committee a letter on Friday evening setting out the Government's intentions for AI and copyright. Reflecting what the Chair of the Liaison Committee, the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), said, both the nature of the letter and the method with which it was received were almost symbolic of how this whole process has been conducted from beginning to end. It was fairly haphazard and chaotic, and it was not entirely clear what the Secretary of State or the Minister intend to happen next, but I am grateful to the Minister for his offer to have a chat to talk us through it.

Specifically, the Secretary of State and the Minister set out their amendments to the Bill and a plan to set up this parliamentary working group, and we would like to know a lot more about that. I understand exactly what the Government are trying to do: they are trying to placate peers and bring the Data (Use and Access) Bill to a conclusion, as the Minister says. The problem is that they are still not engaging with the fundamental existential issue, which is the concerns expressed by people across the creative industries.

The Government's amendment would expedite the economic impact assessment of the options in the AI copyright consultation. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee jointly wrote about that in February. Another amendment would expand the scope of the report to include training outside the UK and enforcement, which obviously should have happened from the start. The amendments are all welcome, but they miss the point of the creative industries' concern that their work and intellectual property are being exploited wholesale, without permission, without payment and without practical means of recourse and redress.

I note that the Minister told the House on 14 May:

"I do not think that what is on the amendment paper today would deliver anything now."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 417.]

The Government giving themselves nine months rather than 12 to conclude what we already know—that their favoured consultation option is completely unworkable—is much less likely to deliver quickly the kind of transparency and enforcement for creators than the amendments proposed in the other place.

The Secretary of State's letter also mentions that the Government intend to set up a parliamentary working group to ensure that

"Parliament has a voice directly into DSIT throughout this process".

The big fear is that this working group will simply be a channel through which the Government will report back on their own engagement with AI developers and rights holders. The Government instead need to be listening to the concerns of Parliament and industry stakeholders. Maybe then they will realise that this stakeholder engagement exercise between rights holders and AI developers has been tried before, as I said earlier, including in the last Parliament. It was scrutinised at the time by the Committee I chair, and each time things have got nowhere. Talks have collapsed because the status quo suits rogue developers acting in bad faith. They think they have nothing to lose by looting the work and value of our creators and our rights holders.

If the Government press on with this working group, we will of course engage and do what we can to support, but let us call it what it is: a distraction technique to divert attention away from the fact that the Government have got themselves into a terrible pickle over this legislation. They started a consultation on AI and copyright when they already had stated a preferred outcome, and they have been cloth-eared to the legitimate concerns of the world-leading creative industries for month after month. They have been virtually dragged kicking and screaming to this position now, where they bring forward a couple of tiny amendments. They have been gaslighting Members of all parties and at both ends of this building who have attempted to draw attention to the situation. They have been somehow pitting our world-leading creative industries against AI, almost presenting them as luddites who are allergic to innovation and technology, when actually these are some of the most groundbreaking and innovative sectors out there. They are using AI every single day to produce world-beating pieces of creative content. The very nature of how the Government have conducted this legislation pits our creative industries against AI, and that is deeply unfair.

It is all not good enough. This is simply a thinly veiled attempt to kick the can down the road—and if kicking the can down the road were an Olympic sport, the Minister would have to add "sport" to his portfolio. If he thinks that any of us are fooled by this, or that it will quieten those who want to stand up for our world-leading creative industries and against the existential threat that they face, he has another think coming.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. We have a hard stop at 2.56 pm, and I know that the Minister will wish, with the leave of the House, to respond to some of the questions that have been asked. Mr Wishart, you have several minutes, but please do not go all the way to 2.56 pm.

Pete Wishart: I am extremely grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will not detain the House, as I have just a few comments to make. Let me begin by saying that it is an absolute pleasure to follow the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage). I had my criticisms of the previous Government, but they did not extend to her. She was someone who understood the issues, and someone who was prepared to try to find a solution. Whereas the previous Government were appalling in the way they dealt with these matters, she at least made every effort, through the work of her Committee, to get to the heart of the debate.

This has been an extraordinary episode, and I cannot believe that we are back here for the fifth time. The issues are usually resolved and dealt with in circumstances such as this, and a meaningful compromise is reached between the Lords and the Commons, but that has failed to materialise during what has been a remarkable session of ping-pong. The whole episode has been as interesting and dynamic as it has been entertaining. The Minister and I were elected at the same time—I think we celebrated our 24th year of continuous membership of the House over the weekend. I am sure he will agree that he has never seen anything quite like the way in which we have reached this stage, but if he can give an

[Pete Wishart]

example to the contrary, I shall be keen to hear it—I know that, given his almost photographic memory, he would be able to provide the details.

What disturbs me is the Government's failure to attempt to secure some sort of meaningful compromise. Their inability to do that is quite baffling. I am trying to think of a few ways in which we might get round this. It might be an idea to get the Secretary of State and Elton John in the same room and lock the door: perhaps when the two of them emerged, we might be able to come up with some sort of solution. We are in the realms of trying to find a way forward, and that might be one way in which we could do so.

By refusing to listen to the strong view of the Lords and respect the convention that ping-pong is a process at the end of which a workable compromise generally appears, the Government risk undermining their own legislative process. Having looked at the Lords amendment again, and having listened carefully to the debate the other day, I cannot see anything wrong with an amendment that simply asks for a draft Bill containing provisions

“to provide transparency to copyright owners regarding the use of their copyright works as data inputs for AI models”.

I thought that was what we were all trying to achieve, and I am surprised at the Government's intransigent resistance to a fairly modest attempt to find solutions.

I have looked at the Government amendments as well, and I welcome them. As I have said to the Minister, the one that excites me most involves this House, parliamentary resources and the ability to play a meaningful part in these matters. I hope that he will be able to extend that to all parties across the House.

Chris Bryant: Even to you.

Pete Wishart: I am thrilled and excited by the prospect of being part of that work, and I look forward to joining the Minister, but I think that it must be as open as possible so that every single aspect of this can be harnessed and used as part of the Government's work. What the Government amendments do not do, however—and this is a key issue—is pay attention to the transparency issues.

The peers have rejected amendments that the Government have tabled previously. As the Chair of the Select Committee said, the Government are bringing these amendments back to try to distract us and give us the impression that they listened to the House of Lords and were near to reaching a compromise, but nothing of the sort is the case, because the key issue is the transparency that the House of Lords, the creative sector and artists across the UK want to see. The existing law should be enforced to protect the wages of 2.4 million creative workers, and the Government must produce a “meaningful compromise” amendment.

It is also entirely possible for the Government to take powers to introduce transparency via regulations, recognising the urgent need to prevent mass theft by AI firms at the earliest opportunity, and I do not know why they have not explored that option. The wages of those 2.4 million UK creators are at stake, as is the principle of the rule of law. The creative industries have made it clear that inaction on the Government's part is giving

“big tech” the freedom to break our laws and destroy jobs. Copyright is not an abstract concept; it is what secures our creative success.

The Government will win in this House today, and they will probably win the whole debate—they will get their way. However, they have lost the battle. One good thing that has come out of this is the fact that people now understand that our copyright laws—our gold-standard copyright regime—underpins the success of the UK's creative industries across the board. Some of the greatest artists in the world are from these islands, and they have achieved their success because of intellectual property rights and our copyright laws. To muck about with those as we have over the past few months undermines all that, and undermines the ability of those artists to continue to lead in their sectors. I hope that, even at this late stage, some sort of compromise can be found with transparency at the heart of it, and I appeal to the Minister to consider that seriously.

2.45 pm

Chris Bryant: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall make a few comments, because it is important to respond to some of the questions that have been asked. Two of my hon. Friends referred to the report that the BFI published yesterday. I warmly commend it to all Members, not least because it makes points that others have made about AI, but also because it makes the point that if films and high-end television in the UK are to be successful in the future, we cannot have this critical shortfall in AI education, which is entirely piecemeal at the moment. We know about that in the Department, and it is one of the things that we want to change.

Several Members have asked who will be involved in the various different groups. I want to draw on all the expertise in both Houses to ensure that we can find the right answers. I do not want to undermine anything that the Select Committees might do, jointly or separately, and like my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Frith), I am keen for all the parts of the creative industries to engage in this process. The difficulty is that we might end up with a very large roundtable, and people might have to bear with us when it comes to how we structure that.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Chris Bryant: Okay, although my hon. Friend was not here earlier.

Chi Onwurah: I apologise for not being here earlier. I commend the Government for engaging in a cross-party discussion about AI, which is what the country needs to do, but the key issue is ensuring from the beginning that the tech companies understand that transparency in copyright and AI is not a “nice to have” but an absolute requirement, and that if they will not deliver it, the Minister will.

Chris Bryant: We have said from the very beginning that transparency is absolutely key to our ability to deliver the package that we would like to put together, and I do not resile from that, but it is only one part of the jigsaw that we need to join up.

I point out to the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) that some of the items on the amendment paper are things that the two Select Committees asked us to do. She is normally more generous to me, and to others, than she has been today. She has clearly forgotten that the last Government introduced plans that would have produced a text and data mining exemption for commercial exploitation of copyrighted materials without any additional protections for the creative industries. That seems to have slipped her mind.

We have moved a great deal since the introduction of the Bill. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology—who is sitting beside me—and I have moved. We have listened to their lordships, and, more importantly, we have listened to what the creative industries have had to say. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) asked me whether I had ever known anything like this situation. Other bills have gone to five rounds of ping-pong, but in the past the row has always been about what is in the Bill, not what is not in the Bill. This is not an AI Bill, and it will not change the copyright regime in this country. I want that regime to be as robust as it ever has been, so that those in the creative industries can be remunerated and earn a living, as they deserve to. That is precisely what we intend to achieve, but we want to get the Bill on the statute book as soon as possible. That is why I need the House to vote with us this afternoon, and I hope that their lordships will agree with us tomorrow.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 189.

Division No. 219]

[2.49 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 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
 Benn, rh Hilary
 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
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil

Craft, Jen
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 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
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 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*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 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
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyle, rh Peter
 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
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Martin, Mike
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McKee, Gordon
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 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
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scroggum, Michelle
 Sewards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin

Snell, Gareth
 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
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve

Tellers for the Ayes:

Gerald Jones and
 Anna McMorris

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Allister, Jim
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Berry, Siân
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis

Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Denyer, Carla
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Easton, Alex
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eastwood, Sorcha
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Flynn, rh Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gethins, Stephen
 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
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Law, Chris
 Leadbitter, Graham
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian

Lockhart, Carla
 Logan, Seamus
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McDonnell, rh John
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 van Mierlo, Freddie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 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
 Swann, Robin

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max

Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wishart, Pete
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Will Forster and
Tessa Munt

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 49F and proposes, in lieu of the Lords amendment, amendment (a) to Commons amendment 45, amendments (b), (c) and (d) to Commons amendment 46 and amendment (e) to the Bill.

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further 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 22

USE OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE POWERS FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, issue or update guidance on what is to be considered a compelling case in the public interest in relation to the use of compulsory purchase powers.

(2) The guidance must make clear that—

- (a) the use of compulsory purchase powers for the purposes of developing or facilitating active travel routes are to be considered in the public interest;
- (b) when proposing the use of compulsory purchase powers for the purposes of developing or facilitating active travel routes, local planning authorities are—
 - (i) required to demonstrate that best efforts have been made to consider alternative route options, but
 - (ii) are not required to demonstrate that the proposed route is the only or best route.

(3) For the purposes of this section, ‘active travel’ means modes of travel which involve a level of activity on the part of the traveller.”—(*Freddie van Mierlo*.)

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to update guidance on the use of compulsory purchase orders for active travel routes.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.4 pm

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 42—*Alignment of basic and occupier’s loss payments*—

“(1) The Land Compensation Act 1973 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 33B (occupier’s loss payment: agricultural land), in subsection (2)(a) omit ‘2.5%’ and insert ‘7.5%’.

(3) In section 33C (occupier’s loss payment: other land), in subsection (2)(a) omit ‘2.5%’ and insert ‘7.5%’.”

This new clause, being an amendment of the Land Compensation Act 1973, would align the occupier’s loss payments with the basic loss payments at 7.5% of the value of the party’s interest.

New clause 85—*Compensation payments*—

“(1) The Land Compensation Act 1973 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 30 (amount of home loss payment in England and Wales)—

- (a) in subsection (1)—
 - (i) omit ‘10 per cent of’;
 - (ii) omit ‘subject to a maximum of £15,000 and a minimum of £1,500.’
- (b) omit subsections (3) and (4).

(3) In section 33A(2) (basic loss payment), omit from ‘payment of’ to the end of subsection (2) and insert ‘the market value of his interest in the dwelling’.

(4) In section 33B (occupier's loss payment: agricultural land)—

(a) in subsection (2), omit from 'payment of' to the end of subsection (3) and insert 'the market value of his interest in the dwelling';

(b) omit subsection (3)."

New clause 107—Disposal of land held by public bodies—

"(1) Section 209 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 (Power to direct bodies to dispose of land) is amended as set out in subsection (2).

(2) In subsection (2), at end insert—

'(C1) Steps taken in response to a direction under subsection (A1) must—

(a) include a duty to consider disposal of land for the public good, and

(b) provide that the difference between the unrestricted value of the land to be disposed of and the consideration for the disposal does not exceed £3,000,000 or 40% of unrestricted market value, whichever is greater.'

(3) Section 209 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 comes into force at the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(4) The Local Government Act 1972 is amended in accordance with subsections (5) and (6).

(5) In section 123 (disposal of land by principal councils), after subsection (2) insert—

'(2ZA) But the Secretary of State must give consent if the disposal is in accordance with subsection (7) of section [Disposal of land held by public bodies] of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.'

(6) In section 127(3) (disposal of land held by parishes and communities), after '(2A)' insert ', (2ZA)'.

(7) Subject to subsection (9), a disposal of land under is in accordance with this section if it is in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 published in Department for Communities and Local Government Circular 06/03, as amended by subsection (8).

(8) Those amendments to the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 are—

(a) in paragraph 2(a)(iii), leave out 'and' and insert, at end—

'(iv) the development and availability of affordable housing, and'

(b) in paragraph 2(b), for '£2,000,000 (two million pounds)' substitute '£3,000,000 (three million pounds) or 40% of the unrestricted market value, whichever is greater';

(c) after paragraph 3(1)(xii) insert—

'(xiii) a combined authority;

(xiv) a mayoral combined authority;

(xv) the Greater London Authority;

(xvi) any successor body established by or under an Act of Parliament to any body listed in this subparagraph.'

(9) The Secretary of State may, to reflect inflation, further amend the cash value that the difference between the unrestricted value of the land to be disposed of and the consideration for the disposal must not exceed."

New clause 114—Development corporations to provide green spaces—

"A development corporation must provide or facilitate the provision of—

(a) green spaces, including private gardens, balconies, and community gardens;

(b) the care and maintenance of the green spaces provided for under this section."

This new clause would ensure development corporations include provision for green spaces in new developments.

New clause 127—Repeal of section 14A of the Land Compensation Act 1961—

"In the Land Compensation Act 1961, omit section 14A."

New clause 128—Community benefit scheme for compulsory purchase—

"(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must by regulations establish a scheme for the purposes of providing members of a local community with certain benefits when a compulsory purchase order has been granted within the relevant area.

(2) Regulations under this section must—

(a) require that, where a compulsory purchase has taken place, the equivalent of 20% of the amount for which the compulsory purchase was made must be paid into a community benefit fund;

(b) describe the—

(i) governance of, and

(ii) purposes for which sums may be payable from the fund;

(c) specify the meaning of—

(i) 'local community', and

(ii) 'relevant area'

for the purposes of a scheme established under this section;

(d) specify the circumstances of compulsory purchase to which the scheme should apply; and

(e) specify the proportion of the sum to be payable into the fund by each party to the relevant compulsory purchase."

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to establish a community benefit scheme in relation to compulsory purchase. The scheme would require the equivalent of 20% of the sum for which a compulsory purchase is made to be paid into a community benefit fund by parties to the compulsory purchase.

Amendment 151, in clause 93, page 122, line 2, at end insert—

"(4) The Secretary of State must, as soon as is practicable after a period of twelve months from the passing of this Act has elapsed, publish a report assessing the impact of this clause on—

(a) the achievement of sustainable development, and

(b) the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change."

This amendment would ensure the Secretary of State must publish a report into the success of development corporations in achieving their duty to have regard for sustainable development and climate change.

Amendment 153, page 145, line 10, leave out clause 104.

Amendment 68, in clause 104, page 145, line 22, at end insert—

"(za) after subsection (1) insert—

'(1A) Subsection (2) also applies if an acquiring authority submits a compulsory purchase order in relation to furthering the purposes of delivering housing targets set out in a local plan.'"

This amendment would provide that, where a compulsory purchase order is applied for to acquire land or property for the purpose of delivering housing targets set out in local plans, the prospect of planning permission being granted can be disregarded when calculating compensation (also known as "hope value").

Amendment 88, page 145, line 22, at end insert—

"(za) in subsection (2), at end insert 'unless the acquiring authority states that the whole of the land is being acquired for the purpose (or for the main purpose) of

provision of sporting or recreational facilities in which case subsection (5) shall not apply.”

This amendment would enable hope value to be disregarded in calculating the compulsory purchase value of land, where it is being purchased for recreational facilities.

Amendment 89, line 23, at end insert—

“(ab) in subsection (5), at end insert ‘unless the acquiring authority states that the whole of the land is being acquired for the purpose (or for the main purpose) of provision of sporting or recreational facilities in which case this provision shall not apply.’”

This amendment is linked to Amendment 88 above.

Freddie van Mierlo: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to new clause 22. Active travel—cycling, walking and wheeling—is hugely beneficial for health and happiness, and I know there is wide agreement on that point in this House. I welcome the investments being made by this Government in active travel through increases to the budget for Active Travel England, but even when there is willingness and funding to progress a scheme, it can be hard to get a plan off the ground, because landowners can refuse to co-operate. Compulsory purchase orders are regularly used for road transport projects, but when it comes to active travel, local authorities are reticent.

I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), for responding to my written parliamentary questions on this matter. On 15 May, he informed me:

“The Department for Transport has not made an assessment of the effectiveness of compulsory purchase order powers in progressing active travel schemes”.

That is somewhat surprising given the scope of this Bill, which aims to speed up infrastructure project delivery, but he did reassure me that local authorities can use CPOs for active travel. However, there is a difference between what is theoretically possible and the reality.

In Committee, this issue was raised by my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), who is a powerful advocate for cycling. We were informed then by the Minister for Housing and Planning that updated guidance was published in October last year, and that it will be updated following the passage of the Bill. I have been through that guidance, and I can tell the House that nothing in it refers to active travel; it is covered only in so far as it falls under the umbrella term “highway”. The problem is that those rules work fine for roads, but are insufficiently adapted for the challenges of an active travel project. Furthermore, this guidance is non-statutory and is an interpretation of current law.

The Minister also signposted me to upcoming guidance from Active Travel England. This will support local authorities in the design and delivery of active travel routes, but it does not include consideration of CPOs. Again and again when the Minister states that there is already guidance, we see that it is insufficient and does not cover CPOs.

It is welcome news that, in response to another of my written questions, the Government have shared that future Active Travel England guidance will include case studies of the use of compulsory purchase orders for active travel routes. However, this is not enough. Active Travel England does good work, but it is not the Government and will never carry the same weight as

statutory guidance. That is why new clause 22, which specifically requires such guidance to be published by Ministers, should be part of the Bill. All other options have been exhausted.

Before going further, let me make it clear that I do not believe that CPOs should be wielded lightly. It is far better to have a constructive relationships with landowners. CPOs should be a last resort, but without the threat of one in the back pocket, we are sending local authorities into negotiations with both hands tied behind their backs.

My county of Oxfordshire is hugely ambitious in its desire to reduce car journeys and roll out a county-wide strategic active travel network linking towns and villages together. In my own corner of the county, there is a clear case for the Thame to Haddenham greenway, which would link the town of Thame with the train station in Haddenham, and allow villagers in Haddenham to get safely to Thame and enjoy the town. There is widespread cross-party support for it, and I am pleased that Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire are working closely together to progress the project. I thank the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith), another of my constituency neighbours, for his support.

When I was a councillor, residents of the beautiful small town of Watlington told me just how valuable a cycleway between Watlington and the village of Lewknor would be. Lewknor sits just off junction 6 of the M40, and it enjoys good bus connections to London and Oxford through the Oxford tube and airport buses. An informal park and ride works well enough, but would it not be so much better if there was a cycle route covering those 2.5 miles? Yet I learned early on that the landowner has no intention of co-operating, even though an old railway would be a perfect route, and the project was stopped dead in its tracks.

It may surprise Members that the issue this new clause seeks to address has already been considered closely by our colleagues in Wales. In 2019, the Welsh Assembly, as it was still called, looked in detail at the issue. The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee made some observations within the context of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 that I think are relevant to building the case for better guidance. The committee was cross-party and chaired by an AM for the Welsh Conservatives. It received evidence from Sustrans that:

“without effective support to ensure that land is made available, key sections of route which could make everyday journeys viable could take years to be delivered, or not be delivered at all.”

Sustrans suggested that the CPO process is a block on active travel routes, as objections to CPOs may be made on the grounds that there is one or more alternative—albeit lower-grade—route options, leaving local authorities vulnerable to challenge. As a result, local authorities are discouraged from beginning a lengthy and costly CPO process. The committee received further evidence from Sustrans that:

“Greater guidance and support is needed for local authorities”. It concluded with a recommendation that the Welsh Government should work with local authorities and other stakeholders to find ways to “unblock” the process of using CPOs to develop cycle routes.

Perhaps recognising this problem, in response to another written question, the Minister yesterday pointed me in the direction of public path construction under the Highways Act 1980 for the creation of active travel

[Freddie van Mierlo]

routes. Although I am grateful for his response, it raises more questions than answers, and I am sure he will be pleased to hear that I will be submitting those questions through MemberHub. I have previously worked with local groups who wanted to get rights of way registered, and it is simply not possible for the highway authority to create public paths where none already exist. The application process requires statements from multiple people showing continuous use over at least 20 years, which does not work for a route that already cannot be used due to private ownership.

Before I wrap up, let me give another shout-out to the work of the Welsh Government, who have recognised that funding for active travel can be hard to find and is often assembled piecemeal. This gives rise to a chicken-and-egg situation: why seek a CPO if there is no funding, and why get funding if there is no viable route assembled? In Wales, guidance therefore requires a compelling public interest in acquisition, but not immediate financial readiness; in contrast, in England, guidance emphasises the importance of demonstrating financial readiness. Will the Minister therefore consider following in Wales's footsteps? I ask the Government not to dismiss my concerns around the inadequacy of the current guidance or the good work of their colleagues in Wales. A Government serious about active travel would engage with these issues, as I am sure this Government will want to do following this debate.

Finally, I will spend a few moments on other new clauses and amendments, including those tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson). The Bill removes hope value to improve the use of CPOs for some projects, but there are further projects that would benefit from a similar policy. Amendments 88 and 89 would ensure that hope value is not added to the cost of recreational facilities such as playing fields when an authority purchases the land with the intention of keeping it as a playing field. Removing hope value is particularly important in an area like Oxfordshire, where any whiff of development massively increases costs. In fact, it is one reason that so many small and medium-sized farms will be caught by the Government's changes to agricultural property relief. If this House accepts the principle of disregarding hope value, that should also apply to the value of land for the purposes of inheritance tax for farms that remain farms.

I also support new clause 107, which would create a duty for any public body to consider the public good when selling land or property. I am aware of local organisations and good causes in my constituency that are looking for space to support their activities where land is disposed of by local authorities. It is right that local organisations benefit when public bodies sell land or properties, such as the men's sheds movement, which seeks to improve mental health by offering practical hobbies in a space where people can meet and share skills.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak to these new clauses and amendments. I humbly ask Members across the House to support new clause 22.

Mike Reader (Northampton South) (Lab): It is fantastic to speak in the Chamber on a subject that has been part of my career for the better part of 20 years. I started

working in the construction sector as a civil engineer and finished my time working on major programmes around the world.

Planning, and particularly planning in respect of national programmes and major infrastructure, has been a headache for me for a long time. The prolonged wasteful consultation that happens on major programmes, which stops the urgency and prevents an outcome-focused approach to delivering the major infrastructure that we need, is almost like death by a thousand cuts for a lot of communities. It is death by consultation and fatigue; it means that people do not engage in the process, and it drives a culture of nimbyism rather than a culture of wanting to deliver the homes and schools—the civil and social infrastructure—that we desperately need, and that everyone across this House calls out for in their constituencies.

3.15 pm

I am excited that the Bill has generated so much interest in the subject of planning and infrastructure. I was amazed to read through all the fantastic amendments that were tabled, many of which I suggest sit outside the core scope of the Bill, which is about speeding up delivery and delivering on the key missions of the Government, but it is fantastic none the less to see so much debate on the nuances, whether it is swift bricks, active travel or those other matters that are critical to creating lasting communities that people want to live in. I look forward to the continued activism from those across the House who have tabled amendments and spoken so passionately about planning—I am sure it was not just for clips for social media.

I recognise what the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) said about new clause 22. My big concern is that forcing change—compulsory purchase being one such example—does not change behaviour. That is something we have seen before. As the subject of Conservative leaflets that said I was going to run ULEZ in Northampton during the election, I know it is something that can become weaponised when we try to force it through, rather than bringing communities along with us. I do not think the approach that has been set out today is the right one, but I look forward to hearing further debate on that.

I want to talk a bit about development corporations. Having worked around the world in a variety of different scenarios and seen how different countries set up delivery vehicles to deliver major programmes for housing and new cities—the infrastructure that we need—I am really pleased to see the introduction of additional powers to enable us to deliver more quickly and to put urgency back into delivery, whether we are developing new homes or towns. The increased powers in the Bill will be critical to ensuring that we have flexibility in the way we deliver those homes, so that they reflect the local community, and that we have sustainability at the heart of a development, so that local communities and bodies can work together to ensure that the places we deliver through the new towns programme in particular are green and sustainable in the long term.

Those powers will also ensure that we can incorporate local need—I am particularly excited to see the transport provisions in the Bill. Often, even in Northampton, I see too many smaller communities disconnected by the lack of transport, because of a lack of thinking

about how people are going to get from place to place, which is so critical when we create new towns. Ultimately, that is about creating place, because we are not just creating new towns; we need to create places where people want to live, work and stay.

We cannot do that without development corporations. I have seen the power for good that such corporations can be in places like east London. I spent a small amount of time living in Newham, where I saw the power that the London Legacy Development Corporation had post the Olympics to transform a deprived area of London, which was fantastic. I wonder now what more it could have done with the additional powers introduced in the Bill.

For me, it is critical to create that local ownership and that drive to deliver, and it cannot just come from the top down. The change in the development corporation arrangements are one of the most undersold parts of the Bill, and will enable us to deliver the homes that are desperately needed by the hundreds of thousands of people living in temporary accommodation in hotels right across every single one of our constituencies.

I do not think this is the end, but I would just reflect that there is plenty more to do on this subject—I have had this conversation privately with the Minister. There is a whole host of things we can do around digital planning, for instance. I was pleased and surprised to see that we are already trialling AI in the planning process in the UK, which could radically improve the way that we deliver projects across the UK. It could mean that communities are not living in uncertainty for weeks and even months as overstretched, under-resourced planning authorities try to work through the backlog that has been left after austerity and the many cuts the Conservatives made to local government.

There is also work to do on building regulations. It was great to hear swift bricks debated yesterday, but there are better ways to deliver on that. On the delivery of major programmes, there is definitely further work to do around consenting and how that is delivered through nationally significant infrastructure projects.

This is a fantastic Bill, but the next stage really is about delivery. The Government must now move from policy focus to delivery focus. We need to look at how we make Natural England and the nature restoration fund work. How we ensure that we work with partners from across the sector, from non-governmental organisations through to development organisations, will be critical in making the Bill work. I look forward to working with the Minister and the Department to ensure that it comes to fruition.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Northampton South (Mike Reader). He was very generous in congratulating many Members on their amendments and very constructive when he outlined his position on this piece of legislation.

I know that Members across the Chamber will be devastated to hear that this will be my last contribution on the Bill before the shadow Secretary of State makes his Third Reading speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I know! I wish to thank the Minister for his hard work, all the Members who contributed to our discussions, and the

Clerks and the staff who gave us such amazing support throughout what I thought was a long, challenging and often frustrating Bill Committee. As a Committee, we all lived through the emotional journey of whether Charlton—a team that the Minister passionately supports—would be promoted. As I said to him during the Committee, he is welcome down to the Den for Charlton's next match against Millwall. I will even let him sit on our side of the stadium.

As I have said, I wish to thank all members of the Bill Committee for their contributions. I also congratulate those, such as the hon. Member for Northampton South, who have tabled amendments to the Bill—we have had a weird, wonderful and varied number of new clauses and amendments. As the hon. Member said, finding them to be in scope of the legislation was quite challenging at times, but I trusted the Clerks to make the right decision and therefore most of them stood.

I look forward to briefly outlining the position of the Opposition on some of the new clauses and amendments before the House this afternoon. Only a small part of the Bill will be discussed this afternoon. The majority of mainstream clauses that we are opposed to were in the frustrating and rather emotive session last night. I look forward to challenging the Minister, who might, I think, look slightly less grumpy than he did last night, and to pleading with him to accept some of our amendments. Then again, Madam Deputy Speaker, I may be dreaming in that regard.

It is clear that the Minister and the Government have a driving mission in this legislation. The Opposition recognise that, but he knows that we have many disagreements on how to achieve the ambitions he has outlined. We have been very clear throughout the passage of the Bill—through the Bill Committee, Second Reading, Report and, later this afternoon, Third Reading—that we have many core, fundamental and principled disagreements with some of the measures the Minister has proposed. Although we agree that we need to build more houses, that we need to see an infrastructure-first approach and that we need to unlock some development, we have a fundamental disagreement with the centralising zeal of both the Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to get us to where they want us to go. We also believe that the Minister could have looked more favourably on some of the new clauses and amendments that were tabled not just by my party, but by other parties in the House and by some of his own Back Benchers, who have proposed well-intentioned and well-meaning measures.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Like others, I sat in the Chamber yesterday listening to the Government voting down so many amendments. We had an opportunity to do something really good with this Bill, and we have missed it. Does the shadow Minister agree that, if we are not careful, we will end up with a piece of legislation that will drive a coach and horses through our communities and our green belt and that does nothing for nature, for farmers, for communities and for the very people who want those things?

Paul Holmes: My right hon. Friend, not uncharacteristically, has made an excellent point and I entirely agree with her. As I said yesterday, the Minister has had a unique opportunity with this Bill—a detailed and potentially groundbreaking Bill—to fundamentally change the

[Paul Holmes]

planning processes in this country for the better. He told us many times on the Bill Committee that he was reflecting on some of the genuine points and key concerns that Members from across the House brought to him. However, those reflections amounted to nothing. He consistently said that he would reflect on the genuine principles that we brought forward, but we have seen no changes in the legislation. We have seen no acceptance of our thoughts and no efforts to change this legislation to reflect the genuine concerns that so many of us brought to this place.

The Liberal Democrats tabled many amendments and new clauses. As the Minister knows, I very rarely praise the Liberal Democrats on the Floor of the House or in my constituency of Hamble Valley, and I am not likely to do so going forward. However, what I would say is that the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) and his colleague, the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), tabled some really good and principled amendments that would have this improved this legislation, particularly on chalk streams and on some of our other concerns.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that Governments of all stripes tend not to accept amendments in this House, enormously to the frustration of colleagues from across the Chamber who put them forward. Will he join me in encouraging the Minister and his ministerial colleagues to take the opportunity to think again on some of the amendments if the Bill is delayed in the other place? All of us want to see more houses built, but in a way that works with communities. As my hon. Friend said, there is an opportunity here to do something historic, so let us make sure that when the Bill goes to the House of Lords—if that is what is required—the Government listen and act.

Paul Holmes: I have put it on the record, both here and in the Public Bill Committee, that I think this is a principled Minister who knows his stuff. Therefore, he should not be afraid to open his arms and embrace collective responsibility across the House to make sure that this legislation is better, and that it serves everybody in this country. He needs to make sure that the key principles that he wants to achieve are actually achievable. I say very strongly, as I did yesterday, that the key things that he wants to achieve, such as these housing numbers, will not be achieved through this legislation. He still has the opportunity to work with Members of all parties to make sure that this is a really important piece of legislation.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Emeritus Professor Sarah Nield, the chairman of the New Forest Association, writes:

“The current planning and environmental frameworks have played a crucial role in protecting the New Forest’s special qualities. However, the proposed changes in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, particularly those aimed at streamlining planning approvals, accelerating infrastructure projects and weakening environmental safeguards, would seriously undermine those protections.”

This is not a political statement; it is a statement of concern for our most delicate and valuable rural areas.

Paul Holmes: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. The expert he quotes is from Hampshire, so as a Hampshire MP I am bound to say that she is spot on. My right hon. Friend is spot on too.

Many Members made contributions yesterday in which they raised concern about the Minister’s response to some of the environmental concerns that were raised, particularly by the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), but also by the Liberal Democrats and Conservative Back Benchers. There are concerns that environmental protections will be diminished under this legislation. The Minister seemed, quite frankly, to not take those seriously. The quote my right hon. Friend read out is a very good example of why there are many people who are experts through their professions and who day to day live their ambitions to ensure that the environment is improved.

I note that the Minister’s Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Harpreet Uppal), has said, “When did you start caring about the environment?”. [Interruption.] She can intervene on me if she wants to, or if she wants to contribute to the debate she might want to bob.

As I said, Members across the House have made very well-intentioned appeals to the Minister. I hope that between now and when he winds up he will open up his arms and ensure that he looks seriously at the amendments, not just from my party but from all parties, that seek to strengthen this legislation.

3.30 pm

Today we turn to parts 4 and 5 of the Bill. The Minister will know that we have long-standing concerns over CPOs. The Conservatives have always stood against what seems to be a sustained campaign against the rights and working practices of our agricultural and farming communities. Through this sustained campaign against farmers, the Government have removed of their subsidies and raised inheritance tax for our farming communities, who already do not make huge profits and who struggle in their day-to-day lives. The Government have also made their working practices harder.

Yesterday the Government voted against our amendment to improve protections against solar farms on agricultural land, and I suspect that later today the Minister will speak against our very sensible amendments that would make the lives of our citizens who work in the agricultural sector easier. Looking at the record of this Government, there has been a sustained attack on the agricultural community, and we see that carrying on through the Bill.

Under this Bill, the rights of that community are being removed or harmed further. We have tried to put that right through our amendments, some of which my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) will speak to in his role as shadow Minister for farming. He has done an admirable job in this role of raising the plight of our farming community across the whole of the United Kingdom in the face of what I would say are detrimental impacts from this Bill and other actions of Government.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that where CPO powers already exist, there is a massive lack of trust between landowners and the acquiring authority? All too often a proposal will be

put on the table, and an agreement will be reached, but then the legal agreement that actually comes along is totally different. Does he agree that there needs to be a CPO code of practice that gives landowners much greater protection?

Paul Holmes: My hon. Friend is right. I would also say that there needs to be a code of practice for our tenant farmers. Two of our amendments, which I will speak to shortly, seek to meet the challenges that our farming and agricultural communities face with CPO. I will elaborate on that later, and my hon. Friend is welcome to intervene on me then if he does not find my explanation satisfactory.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I totally agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) has just said. So many of our constituents, particularly those in the farming community, are already feeling totally let down by this Government, and they feel that this is a further steamroller on their assets. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government might want to show our farming community, who they are already putting under immense pressure, that they are on their side on some of these issues, and probably for the first time in a very long time? So much has already been done to this community—and it does feel like things are being done to them rather than that they are being listened to as part of any process?

Paul Holmes: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pleaded with the Minister at the beginning of my remarks to meet the concerns of not only Conservative Members or the Green party or Liberal Democrats but key people who have communicated through consultations on this legislation that this will harm their livelihoods and make their lives worse.

New clause 85, tabled by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), would deliver a fairer, more just system of compensation for individuals who are forced to give up their homes or land through compulsory purchase. The current framework under the Land Compensation Act 1973 sets arbitrary caps and percentages on home loss and occupier's loss payments, which often fail to reflect the true value of what is being lost. By aligning compensation more closely with the full market value of a person's interest in their property, the new clause acknowledges the deep emotional, financial and practical disruption that compulsory purchase can cause. It would ensure that those displaced by development were not left worse off or unfairly penalised. In doing so, it would uphold the principle that the burden of public interest projects should not fall disproportionately on individual homeowners or landowners, helping to maintain trust and fairness in the planning system. The Minister could easily get behind that, as could other parties. Given some of the real challenges we have talked about that CPOs bring to people, the Minister should be slightly more open to amendments to the Bill that would make their lives easier.

I turn briefly to new clause 42, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), which would align compensation payments more fairly and transparently for occupiers affected by compulsory purchase by amending the Land

Compensation Act 1973. It would increase occupier's loss payments for agricultural and other land from 2.5% to 7.5%, bringing them more in line with basic loss payments. Additionally, it would remove arbitrary caps and fixed percentages on home loss payments and instead base compensation on the full market value of the interest in the dwelling. The change would ensure that those displaced or impacted by compulsory purchase would receive equitable and just compensation reflecting the true value of their property and losses. By modernising and standardising compensation provisions, we would argue that the new clause would support fairness for landowners and occupiers, making the compulsory purchase process more balanced and respectful of individual rights, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) rightly mentioned in his intervention.

I turn briefly to other new clauses. New clause 114, tabled by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, would require development corporations to provide or facilitate the provision of green spaces in their developments, including a variety of green areas such as

“private gardens, balconies, and community gardens”.

Furthermore, it would impose a duty on development corporations to ensure the ongoing care and maintenance of such green spaces. I hope that the hon. Member realises that I am doing him a favour by reading out his new clause.

The Opposition recognise the well-intentioned motivation behind the new clause, but I gently say to the Lib Dem spokesman, who yesterday rightly—this is no criticism—made a big play about the role of local authorities, elected councillors and local plans, that we believe that this area should be dealt with purely by our local government colleagues, councillors and planning committees. We should continue to give them the power to serve and react to our constituents' wishes. We are keen that local authorities such as mine in Fareham and Eastleigh as well as those across the whole of the country have the power to do that for the people they serve. That was a key disagreement between us and the Government—the Liberal Democrats agreed with us—on that provision in the legislation. The Opposition believe that new clause 114 is not required in the legislation because local authorities can provide for that themselves.

I turn briefly to new clause 22 tabled by the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo). Although it is a well-intentioned new clause to promote active travel infrastructure, it risks weakening the careful balance that compulsory purchase powers must maintain between public benefit and individual property rights. By pre-emptively deeming such projects to be in the public interest and lowering the evidential threshold for route justification, the new clause could enable the use of compulsory purchase orders without sufficient scrutiny or community consent, which raises legitimate concerns about fairness, proportionality and transparency, particularly in cases where landowners could lose property without rigorous demonstration that the chosen route was necessary and the best option available. Given the Conservatives' long-held position on CPOs and the overreaching powers that the Secretary of State and the Minister want to award themselves in terms of CPOs, we do not think it would be right to give those same powers to local authorities or some of the new authorities outlined in the legislation.

Freddie van Mierlo: Is the shadow Minister in favour of using CPOs for road projects? The new clause would simply equalise the opportunity to use CPOs to deliver active travel with their use for road projects.

Paul Holmes: I understand, and I say this with respect to the hon. Gentleman: I think the new clause is well intentioned, but roads are absolutely necessary. Sometimes, on the CPO powers currently allocated in existing legislation, even though we disagree with some of the overreach that the Minister wants to put forward, we believe fundamentally in the rights and responsibilities of local government to decide how they want to allocate routes in localities. We agree that in some cases, as in my constituency, which covers half of Fareham and half of Eastleigh, there needs to be better co-ordination between local authorities. However, we fundamentally disagree with the extension and provision of powers, which we do not believe should be allocated, in new clause 22.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): Will the shadow Minister explain why the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 created vast new powers for development corporations, if he believes that all such powers should be discharged by local authorities?

Paul Holmes: I knew that was coming from the hon. Gentleman. The last Government put forward many things in legislation that we are looking at again. We have been very clear about that, and I have been clear about what this new Conservative party stands for. We said throughout the Committee stage that we do not support the extension of powers within CPOs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am aware that you are looking at me to move on. I will do so and restrict the number of interventions I take, as I am about to wind up. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I knew I would bring universal acclaim once again, including from my Deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Mohindra). I thank him.

We have had a robust debate in this House on this groundbreaking piece of legislation. As I have said repeatedly, much to the Minister's embarrassment—I hope he takes this in the genuine spirit in which it is said—even though we have fundamental disagreements on the measures that he is taking to get what he wants later on, we know that he has a well-intentioned and principled approach. The Labour party won the election and we know that. However, that will not stop us having principled and robust arguments around our disagreements with the methods by which he wants to get there.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) indicated in her intervention, the Minister had—and still has—a chance to listen to some of the well-intentioned, educated and intellectual amendments and new clauses that have been proposed by all parties to strengthen the legislation and make it better.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Will the shadow Minister give way?

Paul Holmes: I will briefly, but he will let me finish this point. The proposals have been put forward by all parties to ensure that the legislation is better and more efficient, but fundamentally serves the people who send

us here and who want to see differences in the way in which their country is run. We argue that this legislation does not do that, we argue that this is a massive centralising overreach advocated by the Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, and we stand fundamentally against it.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab) *rose*—

Paul Holmes: I will give way to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) first because he is a sparring partner from the Public Bill Committee—I hope he does not have another quote—and then I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Luke Murphy: Unfortunately, I have another quote, which is from yesterday. With regard to the Opposition's amendments, can the shadow Minister point to a single measure that would increase the number of homes? All the changes directed at the Bill seem to be designed to impede development. I also want to ask him what he meant yesterday in his opening remarks, when he said,

"The last Government built the largest number of houses in history."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 693.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. It might be helpful if I emphasised that we are not here to relitigate yesterday's debate; we are here to debate the amendments that have been tabled today. I am sure the hon. Member will restrict his comments to that.

Paul Holmes: I was expecting so much from the hon. Gentleman, given how he intervened on me consistently in Committee with an encyclopaedic knowledge of my previous quotes. I did not know that he took such an interest in my career up until this point. I know, as a county neighbour, that he is a dedicated and assiduous Member of Parliament who genuinely stands up for his constituents. I will say to him that my comments yesterday were absolutely accurate. Over 1 million homes were approved, and many more first-time buyers were given the chance of owning a home, under the last Government.

3.45 pm

Now, for the first time in history, there is no incentivisation in our housing system for first-time buyers, because measures including the stamp duty relief and some of our Help to Buy measures were scrapped by this Government. This is the first time that we have had that situation. We could have done more, but I am very proud of the last Government's record on housing. The Minister and the Government need to look at our record on first-time buyers and private buyers, because if they emulated some of our incentivisation methods, we would have a better success rate than the just over half of those 1.5 million homes that independent experts are now claiming they will be able to deliver.

Rachel Taylor: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the entertainment he provided throughout the Bill Committee's proceedings, and for his generosity in the Tea Room. Talking about reflection, however, would he agree that when one looks in the mirror, one does not always like what one sees? The Minister has reflected on many of the proposals that were brought forward in Committee

and he has clearly decided that those things would be better left in the national planning policy framework, as opposed to being in this legislation. Would the hon. Gentleman also agree that we do not have more young people buying and owning their own homes now than we did in 2010, and that the reason for that is—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Lady will have the opportunity to contribute later. Interventions really do need to be shorter than this.

Paul Holmes: I know that many of my hon. Friends were concerned to hear about my generosity in the Tea Room. It was simply that we were very tired and I bought an espresso for the Minister, just once. I did offer one to the Lib Dem spokesman, but I have not delivered on that promise—

Gideon Amos: Shocking.

Paul Holmes: I expect to see a “Focus” leaflet—or whatever the Lib Dems put out in Hamble Valley—saying that is a Tory broken promise, but when did we ever take notice of the accuracy of Lib Dem literature? But I will buy him one, I promise. With regard to looking in the mirror and not liking what we see, I wake up daily basis and consider how much weight I have gained in this House over the past four years.

What I will say to the hon. Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor) is that in Committee the Minister consistently said that he would reflect, so she is right; she has accepted the premise of my argument on this. However, not once in this legislation has the Minister made any attempt to take into account our serious concerns. He has not changed this piece of legislation once. This is a parliamentary democracy and there is not a monopoly on brilliant ideas, despite the fact that the Minister likes to think he has one.

If the Minister wanted to make the Bill better, he could look openly at some of our amendments and accept them. I know that when he stands up to make his winding-up remarks, he will not accept them and that this legislation will therefore not be able to be supported by all parties in this House. If he had made some changes that could have delivered to the people of this country, we would have been able to support it. This is a shame, because some of his genuine and well-intentioned attempts to change the housing market in this country will now not be achievable because of the Labour Government’s intransigence.

As I have said, the Minister could have made some decent changes to the Bill. We and the Green party and the Lib Dems had serious concerns on environmental standards—*[Interruption.]* I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary for a very long time, and I thought that PPSs were supposed to sit and ferry notes for their Minister, and not to contribute to the debate. I am having real difficulty with this consistent heckling from the two PPSs. They are aspiring to high office and I really do not think they should be carrying on in this way; I never did—then again, I was never a Minister, so there we go. I am a big fan of them both, of course.

I shall finish on this point. The Greens, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party had a real disagreement on environment standards, and it is still our contention that environment standards will not be improved under this legislation. The hon. Member for

North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) tabled a number of amendments because experts had clearly stated their concern that environmental standards would be reduced under this legislation. The Minister did not make any concessions. On the centralisation and erosion of local powers for planning committees, we tabled a number of sensible amendments—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The shadow Minister will know that we are debating the amendments that have been selected today, on development corporations and compulsory purchase. Perhaps his final minute could be restricted to those subjects.

Paul Holmes: I heed your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. Development corporations are an over-centralisation of the measures that the Minister is proposing, and planning committees will lose some of their powers to them. The Minister has not moved once on that. The Bill will do more harm than good to the power of local councils and our constituents, and it will diminish environmental standards.

We stand against the legislation because of the Government’s intransigence. We will continue to stand up for environmental standards and for local authorities; it is a shame that the Minister has not done so. That is why we will not support the legislation.

David Smith (North Northumberland) (Lab): I am delighted to speak to this monumental piece of legislation, which is so necessary and so important. I cannot help but notice that many times in the debate a false dichotomy has been presented of a choice between nature and biodiversity net gain on the one hand and planning, infrastructure, housing and development on the other. As someone who comes from the most beautiful constituency and county in England—*[Interruption.]* You all know it’s true. I stress that that natural beauty is vital, but that the people of North Northumberland also want more development.

Too often the debate has been about nature versus development. I note, for example, that amendment 151 assumes that development corporations will come into conflict with the need to tackle climate change. I believe that the Bill will be good for our natural world in so far as it unlocks the “little and often” developments that will help Northumbrians to revitalise their rural communities and protect natural landscapes. As the MP for a constituency with a natural landscape, including a dozen sites of special scientific interest and half a national park, I cannot help but be awed by that beauty.

As amendment 151 acknowledges, our natural world faces an uncertain future, with climate change and other pressures. Organisations such as the Northumberland National Park Authority and the Northumberland Wildlife Trust do excellent work in stewarding Northumberland’s unique ecological inheritance. I encourage the Government to continue having a genuine dialogue with environmental groups as the Bill progresses and is implemented in due course. Our language and approach must honour our commitment to environmental stewardship, and we need to thread the needle of sustainable development together.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the ecological treasure trove that is my constituency is more straightforward: dwindling rural communities and the challenges that

[David Smith]

the next generation face in building a future for themselves in rural Britain. North Northumberland, for example, is ageing. Only 16% of its residents are children, while 30% are over 65—10% more than the national average.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): To bring the hon. Member back to the compulsory purchase measures in part 5 of the Bill, which we are discussing today, many residents along the A1 corridor have been severely impacted by the Government's decision not to continue the development of the A1. Will he consider supporting our new clause 42, which would increase the occupier's loss payment from 2.4% to 7.5%? That would help many of his constituents along the A1 corridor. With the new clause in place, they would receive bigger payments for compulsory purchase orders along the A1 corridor.

David Smith: All I can say is simply that I have been working with constituents who have been affected by the compulsory purchase orders, and I will continue to do so. The hon. Gentleman and I may disagree about whether that project should ever have gone ahead under the previous Government.

On rural development, where are the future rangers, conservationists and gamekeepers? Where is the next generation of farm hands to deliver environmental land management schemes?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I will keep reiterating the point: we are not going to relitigate yesterday's debate, and we should be discussing the amendments that have been tabled on compulsory purchase orders, development corporations and extraterritorial environmental concerns. The hon. Gentleman might like to think of a way to weave those topics into his remarks, rather than rehashing either yesterday's debate or a Second Reading speech.

David Smith: I am simply trying to make the point that many of the amendments proposed seem to set up a false dichotomy between the ability to develop our country, including with housing, and to protect the natural environment.

I will give one example of that. Norham parish council in my constituency is trying to open up a plot of land for a small development, because it sees the value of young families moving into the village. That development would go some way towards securing the future of the first school and the community at large. It is not helpful for the parish council to be caught up in red tape, which diminishes the possibility of that development happening. A recent local report said that nearly one in two businesses in rural Northumberland cited a shortage of affordable local housing for staff as a key barrier to business.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend recognise the value that development corporations have brought to new towns such as Harlow? New towns are a great example of where we can have affordable housing but also the environmental aspect, with green fingers and green wedges.

David Smith: Absolutely. There need not be this false dichotomy between what development corporations can do and the protection of our natural environment.

Rural Great Britain is crying out for "little and often" development. We can get this right, and the Bill is trying to deliver that by cutting through labyrinthine planning rules so that we can have more homes and more infrastructure. If there is no one left in rural communities, the natural world will be without the stewards and protectors that it requires.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Gideon Amos: I reiterate my thanks to all members of the Bill Committee and to the Clerks and officials, who I know had plenty to be getting on with during our sittings.

I am grateful for the support of my colleagues for the amendments I have tabled. The Liberal Democrats' new clause 22 on active travel, and new clause 114 on open spaces in new towns and other development corporation developments, and our amendments 88 and 89 on recreational land, form our key proposals for this part of the Bill. All of them urge the Government to go further when it comes to releasing land value for infrastructure that meets community and environmental needs.

On part 5 of the Bill generally, our compulsory purchase proposals included that where major permissions of over 100 homes are not built out, greater powers to acquire that land for housing would be given to councils in a new "use it or lose it" planning permission. I was delighted to hear in the news that the Government are taking up that idea—although I gained a slightly different impression in Committee—even if the promise of more conditionally approved compulsory purchase orders will not give councils the same strong "use it or lose it" power that our amendment would have.

Wary of your strictures to stay on topic, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope you will briefly allow me to add my welcome to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) of the fact that, following the introduction of his private Member's Bill, the Government, to their credit, have agreed that all new homes will be fitted with solar panels as standard—his sunshine Bill really is "winning here"—bringing zero emissions a step closer, after all the hard work of Liberal Democrat and Labour Ministers on zero-carbon homes, before the Conservatives cancelled the programme in 2015.

I turn to our amendments on compulsory purchase and development corporations. Our community-led approach is about the essential infrastructure people want to see being put in place ahead of the building of new homes. Clause 104 could support that by helping the building of council and social homes. It would reward landowners with a fair value, rather than inflated prices from an imaginary planning permission no one has ever applied for, as set out in section 14A of the Land Compensation Act 1961. Our manifesto supports that for the delivery of council houses, and we are supportive of steps that ensure that landowners are awarded fair compensation, rather than inflated prices, for specific types of development scheme.

However, at my meeting with farmers in North Curry on Friday, there was concern about the idea—possibly as a result of rumours—that under the clause, farmers would lose land to Natural England so that it could carry out its environmental delivery plans, and in return would get only a reduced payment. I am not convinced that is what the clause does, but family farms have had a tough time recently. They provide food for our tables, and they have been hit hard by risky trade deals with Australia and New Zealand under the last Government, followed by a new inheritance tax on small family farms, the underspend of the agricultural budget, and the closing of the sustainable farming initiative.

4 pm

Given all that background, I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that the compensation proposals in clause 104, which removes hope value, will extend no more widely than the public interest categories, such as social housing, that were inserted into the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and into schedule 2A of the Land Compensation Act 1961 by the last Government. I am happy to write to the Minister on the detail, but in the light of the rumours that are circulating, I hope that he will give that reassurance to those running small farms in Taunton and Wellington, and across the country.

I respect the experience of the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), in this area, so we have reviewed his proposed new clause 107, which would remove caps on the payments for compulsory purchase. However, our reading of it is that it relates not to the amounts paid for the value of the land or property being compulsorily acquired, which under law must be a fair value, but to payments made on top of the land value. Home loss payments, for example, are made, quite rightly, in addition to the property value to reflect the upset involved, but the proposed new clause would remove all caps and upper limits on how much would have to be paid for that by taxpayers.

Under new clause 107, basic and occupiers' loss payments, which are made to recognise inconvenience, would be increased to the market value of the property, with the result that landowners would be paid the market value twice over for their property, under provisions intended only to recompense inconvenience. We cannot support the new clause because it would result in a reduction in the number of new social homes that it would be possible to provide, as hard-pressed councils, including town and parish councils, would have to pay so much money for these over-the-odds compulsory purchases, and taxpayers would effectively be clobbered to make sky-high extra payments to those with landed interests.

Greg Smith: The hon. Gentleman just said that CPO powers are, to the landlord, an inconvenience. I would say that having a home, farm or business taken is absolute devastation, not an inconvenience.

Gideon Amos: The hon. Gentleman knows he is talking absolute rubbish because those are not the words I said at all. What I said was that the occupiers' loss payments "are made to recognise inconvenience". He may have misheard me. I did not say that farmers were an inconvenience or anything of the kind, and *Hansard*

will reflect that. As the proposed payments would clobber the taxpayer by making them pay double the land's value, we cannot support the new clause.

On the contrary, we say that people are fed up with money going to private developers, leaving local people with little to show for the sacrifices that they are making for new construction projects. There are further areas where the maximum commercial value of land should not have to be paid by public and community bodies. Under amendments 88 and 89, proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), hope value would not have to be paid in CPO cases where land is being acquired for sport or recreation. Her new clause 107, relating to disposals of land by public bodies, would ensure that top dollar did not have to be paid where the Secretary of State certified that the disposal was for "public good"; in those cases, a discounted price could be paid.

As we have heard, another Liberal Democrat amendment, new clause 22 proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo), would provide a "compelling case" justification for compulsorily purchasing land for new footpaths and cycle paths. Knowing the location of Haddenham and Thame parkway station as I do, I congratulate him on this key proposal, which would really help his constituents.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Local authorities could really do with compulsory purchase powers for cycling and walking paths. The Devon local cycling and walking infrastructure plan that came out last December said that

"certain private sector development...may come forward sooner, or later, than anticipated".

Local authorities do not have any control over when they can put in walking and cycling paths. Would my hon. Friend's amendment correct that?

Gideon Amos: The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame would definitely provide a much stronger justification for a CPO that enabled footpaths and cycle paths to be made. As he said, it would create a more level playing field with the compulsory purchase powers already in use for highways. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord). New clause 22 is a very logical amendment, and there is no logical reason why Ministers should reject it, although that has not stopped them so far; I hope that they break the habit of a lifetime.

We are clear in our amendments that communities should lead, and should be in the driving seat, when it comes to development and land. When people see the infrastructure for which they have been calling, it drives more community consent for the homes we need and the communities that we want to build. We need infrastructure for nature as well. Good places to live have gardens, open spaces, parks and meadows, so our new clause 114 would charge development corporations with ensuring those things.

I remind the shadow Minister that development corporations discharged planning powers under Conservative Governments, just as under Labour and coalition Governments. It is not always local authorities that deliver development. It is therefore right to ensure that development corporations discharge their duties as

[Gideon Amos]

effectively as possible. If and when they build new towns and major developments, as the Government want them to, they must ensure open spaces for nature—spaces that work for people and our environment. Amendment 151 would require them to report regularly on their environmental and climate duties.

The first garden cities were supported by a Liberal Government and built without felling a single tree, as the hon. Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff) confirmed yesterday. Their successes were emulated, and they are still emulated in the best developments, right up until today. The vision was a radical one of bringing people and the environment, town and country, and nature and humanity closer together. Those pioneers ensured healthier places to live in, an objective that our new clause 6, promoted by the Town and Country Planning Association, would insert in the planning objectives. Today, however, we face the much greater challenge of saving nature, as well as community cohesion and consent, before it is too late.

These amendments may not pass, but make no mistake: there are no greater threats to our way of life than the breakdown of trust, which risks destroying communities, and the breakdown of our environment, which is destroying nature. Those are the challenges that our amendments would tackle head-on, and I humbly urge Members to support them.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Once more unto the breach. I rise to speak in favour of amendment 68 in my name, and I hope to find as much common ground with Ministers as possible. I fully agree with the Government that we need bold reform of the planning system to tackle the housing crisis, and that is what even stronger reform of CPOs would deliver.

We have substantially more homes per capita than we did 50 years ago, yet over that time, house prices in the UK have risen by 3,878%. The Minister for Housing and Planning was right to argue that housing supply is not a panacea for affordability. There have been 724,000 more net additional dwellings than new households in England since 2015, so the Deputy Prime Minister was right to argue that there is plenty of housing already, but not enough for the people who desperately need it. The fundamental planning reform we need is an end to the developer-led model, which Shelter estimates is on track to deliver just 5,190 social rented homes per year, despite those being the very properties that we need to reduce waiting lists and get families out of temporary accommodation.

The housing crisis is one of inequality. We must move away from reliance on the vested interests of private developers, whose priorities will never align with the public good. Amendment 68 is intended to ensure just that. Half of England is owned by less than 1% of its population. Between 1995 and 2022, land values rose by more than 600% to £7.2 trillion, which amounts to more than 60% of the UK's net worth. The amendment would build on Government proposals to give councils the land assembly powers necessary to acquire sites to meet local housing need at current use value, and so would do away with speculative hope value prices, which put taxpayers' money into wealthy landowners' pockets.

That would finally make it affordable for local authorities to deliver the new generation of council homes that is the true solution to this nation's housing crisis.

If we coupled strengthened compulsory purchase powers with a more strategic approach to site identification and acquisition, we could not only increase the amount of affordable housing built, but achieve genuinely sustainable development, and would no longer be beholden to whatever ill-suited proposals developers chose to bring forward.

The failings of our developer-led planning system are writ large across my constituency. In the 10 years from 2014 to 2024, North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire delivered a significant expansion of housing supply—3,973 and 7,948 net additional dwellings respectively. What happened to local authority housing waiting lists over the same period? They rose from 1,612 to 2,449 in North Hertfordshire and from 2,005 to 2,201 in East Hertfordshire. There have been more than enough new homes in my area to clear housing waiting lists, but the affordable homes we need are simply not delivered by a profit-driven model. A further fact stands out: over that decade, during which housing supply and waiting lists grew simultaneously in North and East Hertfordshire, not a single council house was built in either authority.

It is time for a genuine alternative to this farce. I urge the Government to look closely at the amendment, and to push onwards to create a planning system that once again puts people before profit.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I will speak to the amendments relating to compulsory purchase powers, and to my new clause 128. I note that much of the Bill and most of the clauses will not affect Scotland, but, unusually for a planning Bill, there are components that do affect it.

Before I talk about the detail of my concerns about compulsory purchase powers, I want to set out a little of the context, and say why the issue is exercising so many of my constituents. I am privileged to represent the Scottish Borders—the place I call home. It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom, but it is under attack. The net-zero-at-all-costs agenda of this UK Labour Government, backed by the SNP in Edinburgh, is causing huge concern to my constituents. Massive pylons, solar farms, wind farms and battery storage units are ruining the Scottish Borders as we know them, and compulsory purchase powers are a key part of delivering many of those projects.

Wendy Morton: When it comes to infrastructure, such as battery energy storage systems, it is not just the Scottish Borders that are affected, but areas like mine, Aldridge-Brownhills in the west midlands. I support what my hon. Friend says about this feeling like encroachment, and about increasing compulsory purchase powers. Where will it end?

John Lamont: I share my right hon. Friend's concerns. Ultimately, this is about choices. The choice that this Government and the Scottish Government are making is whether we protect our natural environment, and the rural communities that have sustained food production for many years, or turn them into an industrial wasteland. The compulsory purchase powers in the Bill that affect my constituency in Scotland will affect many similar communities in England.

My constituents in the Scottish Borders have had their fair share of new developments. In the Scottish Borders, the countryside is where we live. It is not some distant, remote area that is occasionally visited by tourists from Edinburgh or London; it is the place we call home. Compulsory purchase powers must be exercised with appropriate checks and balances in order to protect our communities, whether in Scotland or in other parts of the UK.

I now turn specifically to the amendment that stands in my name, new clause 128, which deals with compulsory purchase and the community benefit related to it. We all know that when compulsory purchase takes place, it is difficult and often devastating for those who are directly affected. Too often, though, we fail to recognise the impact on the wider community, especially when it comes to new energy infrastructure. We have to improve the relationship between those affected and those acquiring the land. Compulsory purchase can be a complex and intimidating process.

4.15 pm

New clause 128 would have required the Secretary of State to establish a community benefit scheme in relation to compulsory purchase, so that the equivalent of 20% of the sum for which a compulsory purchase is made would be paid into a community benefit fund. I am conscious of time, so will not detain the House for much longer. I know that there will not be a vote on my new clause tonight, but if there is any way in which the Government could improve the support provided to communities affected by these sorts of developments through a community benefit scheme, the Bill would be significantly improved.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech about choices, but this is also about fairness. The compulsory purchase powers contained in part 5 of the Bill disregard any hope value over and above agricultural value, which is not fair at all for those landowners who are having their land compulsorily acquired. If my hon. Friend's new clause were accepted, the 20% to which he refers would be 20% of the agricultural value rather than the market value, as the Government have stipulated, so less money would be going into the benefit scheme. Would it not be better if the Government were advocating market value for compulsory purchase, rather than disregarding it in favour of agricultural value?

John Lamont: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I agree with him. I am sure he will speak to those points further when he contributes later. We should be protecting the market value and not doing anything to interfere with the market—not least because if my new clause were accepted, it would improve the community benefit fund, which in turn would benefit the local residents who are directly affected by these types of projects. If the Bill could be improved in this way, it would be better for the people who live in rural communities, such as those in the Scottish Borders.

As we saw again yesterday, this UK Labour Government have U-turned a lot over the past few months. I hope they will take this opportunity to listen to right hon. and hon. Members from across the House so that we can protect our beautiful environment, protect nature, and do better for rural communities.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is an honour to speak in this important debate. I will address three amendments that stand in my name: amendments 88 and 89, which go together and relate to hope value, and new clause 107, which relates to the disposal of public land.

Amendments 88 and 89 are linked and represent a simple yet important change to the Bill. They would extend the circumstances in which hope value may be disregarded in the event of a compulsory purchase order to include playing fields and recreational facilities. I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues warmly welcome the important changes in the Bill. Ministers have brought forward measures to reform the CPO process for the purpose of building more affordable homes, so that hope value no longer over-inflates land prices for acquiring authorities. However, I believe that a prime opportunity has been missed. As such, my amendments seek to include recreational facilities such as playing fields in these provisions when an acquiring authority—for instance, a local authority—is using a compulsory purchase order to acquire land for use as a sports or recreational facility. They would ensure that hope value would not be applied, thus making the cost more affordable and helping to boost grassroots sports provision in communities up and down the country.

We in Twickenham, Teddington, the Hamptons, St Margarets and Whitton are incredibly fortunate to have a thriving grassroots sports scene, from football to cricket, rugby, hockey, tennis and much more. Girls' and women's football is just one example of the continued growth in grassroots sports in my constituency; my own daughter plays with the growing number of girls' teams at Whitton Wanderers, and Twickenham Cygnets now boasts over 300 girls and has 40 women—Twickenham Swans—on its books. However, they are at the point of turning more away because they simply cannot get the pitch space to train and play matches. This problem affects many clubs across the country, and certainly right across the London borough of Richmond upon Thames. At the same time, we have the absolute scandal of Udney Park playing fields in Teddington lying derelict for more than a decade, with successive developers paying over the odds for the site, only to be rightly prevented from developing it; that precious site has numerous protections attached to it.

The brilliant Udney Park Community Fields Foundation—a community group in my constituency led by Jonathan Dunn, who has been a tireless campaigner for grassroots sports—has repeatedly bid for the site to bring the playing fields back into community use. The current owner has given notice that he wants to sell the playing fields, but has not engaged with the foundation at a realistic playing fields valuation. Trying to recoup a high purchase price for this precious and well-protected site does not look feasible. Extending the Bill's provisions to playing fields to allow hope value to be disregarded for a compulsory purchase order could allow such sites to be acquired by the local authority or another public body.

Richmond council, like many other local authorities, is hardly awash with cash, but simply having that provision in law would provide leverage for community groups when they have to negotiate with developers, as we have seen in the case of Udney Park. I am certain that Udney Park is not the only example where this is happening.

[Munira Wilson]

I was therefore extremely disappointed by the Minister's response to these amendments in Committee, which, with all due respect, was contradictory. He rejected them on the following basis:

"Affordable housing, education and health are types of public sector-led development where the public benefits facilitated through the non-payment of hope value can be directly demonstrable to local communities. The Government have concerns that the provisions would be less compelling for sporting and recreational facilities."—*[Official Report, Planning and Infrastructure Public Bill Committee, 20 May 2025; c. 489.]*

I say that sport and physical activity are critical to physical and mental health, and he said that health is an important public benefit for the purposes of disregarding hope value.

Just yesterday, Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport stated that the Government

"are committed to supporting the growth of grassroots sports across the UK."

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport made a brilliant speech last night at an event attended by many Members in this place to launch the inspirational Lionesses' campaign to defend their European crown. She was passionate about the importance of grassroots sports and extending opportunity to every community. She has announced £100 million of investment in grassroots sports facilities, which is extremely welcome.

The change proposed through my amendments would help Ministers to achieve the important objective of expanding sports and recreation grounds without costing them a penny. It would not encroach on the principle that the use of CPO powers must be proportionate and justified in the public interest, given that Ministers have so strongly and correctly championed the growth of grassroots sport across the UK as being in the public interest. The amendments would apply solely to land that is already sports field or recreational land, where there is local need for that sports and recreational facility and it is at risk of loss to speculative development.

It is entirely proportionate and justified in the public interest that CPO powers and the removal of hope value should apply in such circumstances, so it defies all logic that Ministers have not embraced this change and that they continue to oppose it. I look forward to hearing an explanation from the Minister. I hope he will at least commit to engaging further on this issue as the Bill moves to the other place. Perhaps he will meet me to discuss it, rather than dismissing it completely.

Let me turn to new clause 107, which is also in my name. There is cross-party consensus on the dire need for more housing across our country. The Liberal Democrats have a strong commitment to delivering desperately needed social housing, so it was disappointing to see Labour Members vote against our amendment 15 last night to write a social housing target into law. One important way to secure sites for social and affordable housing is when public bodies dispose of land and buildings. In constituencies such as mine, with its royal park, a river and other important protected parks and spaces, sites are few and far between, yet week in, week out I see cases in my inbox and at my constituency surgeries of families on the social housing waiting list for years, with little hope of getting out of desperately overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation.

I am incredibly proud that Liberal Democrat-run Richmond council has consistently sought to repurpose, and sell below market value, sites that it owns but no longer needs to provide for more social homes from which families in my constituency can benefit. The council has done this despite the immense pressures on local government funding, but sadly other public bodies do not feel able to do the same, whether they are national Government Departments such as the Ministry of Defence, key public services such as the Metropolitan police, or arm's length bodies such as NHS England. They all want to achieve as high a price as they can when selling assets that they no longer need in order to be able to invest in frontline public services. That is a laudable and important aim, but it prices social housing providers, and other public service providers, out of the market, while losing assets from the public sector balance sheet at the same time.

New clause 107 would fill the gaps in the existing patchwork of legislation and regulation that is somewhat piecemeal in the public bodies included and is not properly used to allow all public sector bodies to sell assets below market value for public benefit, whether that is for social housing or for much-needed community infrastructure like health facilities or a community centre. Not only would it extend that provision to all public bodies; it would go further still by imposing a duty on all public bodies to at least consider disposing of assets for public good.

This wide-ranging new clause builds on my successful campaign in the last Parliament, when I worked with a succession of Conservative Housing Ministers to secure a change in the then Bill, which became the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, that included police authorities under existing provisions to sell public assets below market value for public good. My campaign was born of frustration about the fact that the disused Teddington police station lies derelict in my constituency. A local housing association and the Park Road GP surgery are desperate to obtain the site to expand and provide state-of-the-art GP facilities on the ground floor, as well as much-needed social housing on the floors above. This Government think that all members of the public are blockers, but I can tell the Minister that the Teddington community are right behind my campaign, and we will fight tooth and nail to ensure that when the Met puts the site on the market we can obtain the GP surgery and housing that our community desperately need at a reasonable price, which will almost certainly not be as high as private developers can offer.

I secured the legislative basis to achieve that ambition in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, but in many other cases the provision is not there or is not used. Furthermore, the amount below market value for which some public sector bodies can dispose of their assets has not been updated since 2003. New clause 107 seeks to address that anomaly, although I note that the Conservative Government made a commitment to consulting on and reviewing the amount—something that did not happen before they left office, and something that the present Government have not implemented since they took power last year.

The Chancellor herself has previously said that surplus Government land is a

"huge untapped resource that could create opportunities for the next generation of homeowners."

I warmly welcomed the news in March that Network Rail would set up a property company to use surplus land for house building. There is so much more than just Network Rail land, but we need both the legislative basis for public sector disposals below market value and the incentives to achieve those sales. I do not blame the Metropolitan Police Commissioner for wanting to get top dollar for Teddington police station, especially when I read about the cuts that he is having to make to frontline policing and the intransigence of the Treasury when it comes to proper funding for the community policing that the Government have promised.

I say to Ministers that this is robbing Peter to pay Paul. We need a duty on all public bodies, and financial incentives from the Treasury for them to repurpose or sell their assets for community good. We can achieve the homes and public services that our country desperately needs, not by ripping up our green belt and precious open spaces but by thinking creatively about how we repurpose existing sites, including those already owned by the taxpayer. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Robbie Moore: I rise to speak about new clause 127 and amendment 153, both of which are in my name.

Compulsory purchase is a highly emotive and highly controversial subject. Indeed, much of yesterday's debate was taken up by discussion of precisely the new CPO powers that the Bill will grant to Natural England and local authorities. The fact that under the Bill a farmer in Keighley can be told how to use his land, on pain of a CPO, as a result of a development in Kent is complete and utter madness, but that is exactly the intention of the Bill. No matter where someone owns land, they may be put at detriment by a scheme that is taking place elsewhere. That is exactly what the Government intend to do through the additional CPO powers: to give Natural England—an organisation with which I have huge frustration and which, dare I say it, is not accountable robustly to a Minister—more power to use compulsory purchase orders.

4.30 pm

Wendy Morton: I share my hon. Friend's frustrations with Natural England. Does he agree that it is a bit strange that we have a Government who say they want to reduce the number of quangos, but who have reduced it by one and introduced 27? In this Bill, they are giving more powers to an unelected quango, which risks doing further untold damage to our green fields, our open spaces and our farmland.

Robbie Moore: That is exactly why I am so frustrated by the intent of the Government's Bill. It gives Natural England more compulsory purchase powers, more funds through environmental delivery plans, and an ability to scrutinise and, indeed, to dictate to landowners how their land or farm may be utilised. That is wrong, especially when, as I say, a farmer farming in my constituency of Keighley could be subject to a CPO as a result of a development elsewhere in the country.

The Government and I absolutely disagree on the right to use CPO, and I really struggle with the expansion of section 14A orders, which will allow an acquiring authority to discount the hope value of a seized property. Property rights matter, because they are the foundation

of our society. If the state chooses to use its powers to confiscate the property of a law-abiding person, stipulates how that land must be used, and then tells the landowner how much they are entitled to receive, that is wrong—in my view, it is an absolute theft of private property. So-called hope value is not a capitalist trick, a racket or unfair; it is simply the true market value of the property. That is why I fundamentally disagree with the purpose of the Bill, which entails the Government's stipulating that hope value must be disregarded over and above the agricultural value that is to be paid. It should not be the law that decides the value of something; it should be down to negotiation and the market.

That brings me to fairness. Although I admire the Government's aspiration to increase development, the Bill is fundamentally flawed on the issue of fairness, because it takes away the property rights of landowners—the very landowners who will have been encouraged by their local authorities to put forward their land to be zoned as part of a local plan, and encouraged through a service level agreement process to have their land zoned for housing, employment or whatever it may be. As a result of this piece of legislation, the local authority, or indeed Natural England, will have the ability to compulsorily acquire the land not at market value, but at agricultural value.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): The powers to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and which his amendment seeks to remove—I will come on to speak about it in more detail—were set out in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that he voted for that Act? He voted for these powers.

Robbie Moore: But the Government are going way beyond that and giving more powers to local authorities and, indeed, Natural England. If the Minister has gone out and spoken to anyone in the agricultural world, he will realise that trust in Natural England is shot, yet the Government are giving it more powers to compulsorily acquire land and then effectively dictate to our farmers and landowners how their land is to be managed. I am not in favour of that. That is why I urge the Government to consider my new clause 127 and amendment 153. It is frustrating that, despite this issue being raised in Committee, the Government have not given it due consideration, and I therefore urge them to rethink their position.

Section 14A orders represent an attempt to run roughshod over our landowners. We can debate the merits of that approach, but we must start by calling it out for what it is. This Bill extends the section 14A powers to parish councils and Natural England, and applies the cut valuation of occupier's loss, which is a separate payment meant to reflect the disruption to the occupier, not the loss of an asset. That is exactly why I wholeheartedly support Opposition new clause 42, which would increase the occupier's loss payment from 2.5% to 7.5% of what is paid for the land. It adds to my frustration that the valuation will be based on the agricultural value, not the market value.

John Lamont: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that one of the flaws of the Bill, which his amendments attempt to address, is that it

[John Lamont]

overreaches not only in attacking property rights in this country and interfering with the market, but in taking away key aspects of democratic accountability? That is why so many of our constituents across the United Kingdom are so concerned about what the Bill attempts to do.

Robbie Moore: That is exactly why I urge the Government, as I have throughout the passage of the Bill—I know this point was also raised in Committee—to realise the huge level of disenfranchisement it represents for landowners. This Bill is not introducing fairness into the system, because it does not enable the state to pay the market value that should be attributed to anything that is compulsorily acquired. That is why I do not support the Bill, and I will be proud to vote against it on Third Reading.

Gideon Amos: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way during his speech against all the things he voted for under the last Government, but I am confused by Opposition Members. Is there no limit to the amount of taxpayers' money they would give to landowners, rather than to councils so that they can build social housing, roads and the other public facilities we need?

Robbie Moore: Here we have the Liberal Democrats setting out their position, and it is a good that they are doing so because I fundamentally believe that if a farmer owns land and the state seizes control of it through compulsory purchase powers, it is absolutely right that that farmer should be rewarded with the market value, not the agricultural value. I know the Liberal Democrats have set out their position that they fully support just agricultural value being paid, not what the land is really worth at market value, and I hope all farmers across the country understand the Liberal Democrat position, which is to disregard that hope value.

I want to know whether the Government have undertaken an impact assessment on the Valuation Office Agency. As we go through the compulsory purchase process, there will be many a challenge—quite rightly—by land agents or valuers acting on behalf of those many landowners to understand the true value of their land. I fear that the Valuation Office Agency will not be able to cope with the level of scrutiny there will rightly be of the Government's position.

Wendy Morton: My hon. Friend has set out some of the challenges the Bill presents for the farming community. Part 5 provides authorities with significant compulsory purchase powers, but with no definition or limits whatsoever. For our farming community, this all comes on top of the changes to agricultural property relief, business property relief and inheritance tax, and the increased national insurance for employers. What is it about the farming community that this Government do not like?

Robbie Moore: The farming community faces so much uncertainty not only as a result of the Bill, but because of all the additional pressures, whether it is the family farm tax or the increases in overheads, that are hitting cash flow this year.

That is why my new clause 127 and amendment 153—and, indeed, Opposition new clause 42—are so important. It is frustrating that the Government are just throwing out these amendments and are not willing to consider them, because they have been put forward in the best interests of our farming community and our landowners, so that the state does not have the control that this Government are willing to give it. I urge the Government to consider these very practical, sensible amendments to the Bill.

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): I am happy to speak today in support of amendment 151, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos). Our planning system needs reform, but the approach the Government are taking in the Bill is sadly all wrong and desperately needs to be amended.

Amendment 151 would compel the Secretary of State to produce a report that addresses a key principle of my concern with the current house building regime, which is good design. I am pleased that in drafting clause 93, the Government have recognised that good design goes hand in hand with sustainable development, but we need to see evidence that the houses we are getting are actually being designed and built better if we are to be confident that we are not just getting more of the same from the big developers.

No one has ever told me that they want more energy-inefficient chocolate box homes, buried deep in rabbit warren estates and built to maximise developer profit. What we see too often in North Norfolk is homes that people do not like and cannot afford, but which they must queue up to buy because there is no other option. I was horrified recently to find that developers had put covenants on an entire estate to ban branded vehicles from parking on private driveways—they might as well have marketed those homes as for rich second home owners only. That is not how we want to design our communities of the future.

The Government are already taking steps towards good design by accepting the provisions of the sunshine Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson), which mandates solar panels on new builds. It can sometimes seem that politicians ignore good ideas if they come from Opposition parties, so I am particularly pleased that the Government have come to share the Liberal Democrats' view that having solar panels on new builds is just common sense.

It is not just about the homes themselves; good design is also about how and where we build new houses. People are growing tired, rightly, of estates that are designed around car use, rather than putting public transport or walking and cycling at the heart of design. We can encourage more people to walk or use public transport if we design developments in a way that makes it easy and attractive to do just that. When we use scheme design to encourage walking and cycling rather than car use, access to public transport rather than car parks, and routes that take people to town centres rather than bypasses, we see the benefits right across society: in reduced pressure on health services, in better natural environments and in more cohesive, resilient communities.

Good design will also support the second key aim that amendment 151 seeks to have the Government report on, which is tackling the climate emergency. It is

simple: a development that means fewer fossil fuel-powered cars are required to be on the roads will be better for the planet than one that does not.

I do not think that people in North Norfolk are unreasonable in asking for developments to be affordable to buy or rent and sustainable and low cost to heat and power, and to feel connected to communities and not a burden on them. My constituents want to end the housing crisis, but they do not want it done through unaccountable, top-down targets. They want a design-led approach to planning and infrastructure development. I hope the Government hear our proposals to achieve that and support them today.

Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): In my constituency, we have seen the consequences of house building without the infrastructure to match. This Bill is such a missed opportunity: the Government are repeating the same top-down, developer-led approach that has already failed, sidelining communities, undermining local plans and cutting local councillors out of key decisions. That is why I rise today to speak in support of some amendments.

The current system often sees vital infrastructure lagging or not being delivered for years after houses have been occupied because the delivery of infrastructure is left to developers that submit viability studies and variations of conditions. We need a planning system that puts people and places first, and that includes high-quality active travel infrastructure.

We are lucky in Stratford-on-Avon to have the much cherished Greenway, a traffic-free five-mile cycle path and bridleway, but we also need cycling and pedestrian infrastructure in high-volume streets in our towns so that children and young people can travel to school safely and families can access services, while reducing car journeys and keeping people fit and healthy.

In the rural areas of my constituency, the Two Shires Greenway group is campaigning for an ambitious cycling route along a disused railway. These will link villages to the towns of Stratford and Alcester in my constituency and then further afield to Evesham. But beyond the feasibility studies, the fragmentation of land ownership is an issue. That is why I support new clause 22, proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo), which strengthens powers to compulsorily purchase land for active travel routes.

4.45 pm

Richard Foord: That sounds similar to the Otter Trail in my patch, which would link Feniton to King's School at Ottery St Mary. Does my hon. Friend agree that these new active travel paths will enable young people to get to school safely?

Manuela Perteghella: Yes, absolutely. We need to ensure that our new generation of young people are fit and healthy and able to cycle. That would also reduce carbon emissions in our towns. We need high-quality cycling infrastructure to ensure that all this happens.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Lady is making a principled speech. Can she explain to the House why she does not think the current local plan regime is adequate to ensure

that we have sustainable travel routes? Bringing CPOs into such areas would be regressive to people's rights and responsibilities.

Manuela Perteghella: I thank the shadow Minister for his question. Let me take the case of the disused railway in my constituency. It is not in public ownership any more, and it is fragmented. We can fund as many feasibility studies as we want to invest in cycling infrastructure, but an incidental green space is not used by landowners at all. If we compulsorily purchased such land—obviously we would offer compensation—we could have high-quality cycling infrastructure that would link up villages to the major towns, so that people can attend GP appointments, schools and so on. The paths are also off-road—away from our gridlocked roads.

Development must come with green and wild spaces, not just tarmac and bricks. That is why I strongly support new clause 114, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos), which would ensure that development corporations include green space provision in all new developments. Green spaces are not a luxury; they are essential for mental health, biodiversity, wildlife, flood prevention and community cohesion. Like green spaces, playing fields and recreational facilities are fundamental for the development of grassroots sports and for youth opportunities, and therefore I support amendments 88 and 89 of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson).

We also need serious, measurable action on climate. Development corporations are being handed significant powers, yet the Bill fails to guarantee that they are delivering in line with the UK's climate targets. That is why amendment 151 is so important. It would ensure that the Secretary of State publishes a report on whether development corporations are meeting their legal duties on sustainable development and climate change. With so much at stake, we need transparency and accountability built into the system.

Finally, we need new homes that are genuinely affordable, warm and built to high standards. In Stratford, many families and young people are priced out of their own community. It is not enough to build houses; we must build the right homes in the right places with the right infrastructure, green spaces and recreational and sports facilities that create communities.

I urge the Government to back these amendments and take this opportunity to deliver a planning system that is fair, sustainable and community led.

Matthew Pennycook: It is a pleasure to respond to what has been a thoughtful and, largely, well-informed debate about a piece of legislation that is, to quote the shadow Minister, "groundbreaking". I thank all hon. Members for their contributions this afternoon. Can I take the opportunity to thank the shadow Minister and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos), for their robust but civil and fair approach to scrutiny in Committee?

I want to respond to the key amendments and the arguments that have been made this afternoon. Among other reforms and interventions, the Government are clear that significantly boosting our housing supply requires a renewed focus on building large-scale new communities across England. Development corporations

[Matthew Pennycook]

are vital vehicles for delivering large-scale and complex regeneration and development projects. The Bill creates a clearer, more flexible and more robust framework to ensure that they can operate effectively. While there is clearly widespread support across the House for the effective use of development corporations where appropriate, a number of amendments have been tabled that seek to impose specific requirements on them.

New clause 114 in the name of the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington would ensure that development corporations include provision for green spaces in new developments. The Government absolutely agree that delivery of large-scale development and regeneration projects must include the provision and stewardship of green space, which has a wide range of benefits, including supporting health and wellbeing, climate mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity and wildlife.

We do not believe that the new clause is necessary to deliver on these objections. First, development corporations have a strong track record of providing suitable green space. Ebbsfleet development corporation, for example, has a target for the delivery of parks, open spaces and recreation areas, providing almost 15 hectares of parks in recent years, and this year aiming to provide around 10 hectares of new parks and open spaces.

Secondly, development corporations that take on local plan-making powers are already subject to national planning policies, including those concerning green infrastructure. This means that where development corporations take on local planning authority powers, any planning decisions made should be informed by the national planning policy framework, which, as hon. Members will be aware, is a material consideration when determining planning applications.

As the House will know, the NPPF sets out policies to encourage the provision of green infrastructure and outlines that plans should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, making sufficient provision for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including green infrastructure. The NPPF also sets out that 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 that plans should seek to accommodate. It is the Government's view that the duty proposed in this new clause may unhelpfully constrain some development corporations—for example, where development corporations are designated specifically for the redevelopment of smaller commercial spaces.

On the stewardship of green spaces, each development corporation has a designated oversight authority, which is either the Secretary of State, a mayor, or local authorities, and it is for them to set specific frameworks for stewardship arrangements. Although I commend the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington for once again highlighting this important issue, I hope that with the explanation I have provided he will agree to withdraw his amendment.

I turn to the reforms to compulsory purchase in the Bill, which are designed to improve the CPO process and land compensation rules to enable more effective land assembly through public sector-led schemes. New clause 127 and amendment 153 tabled by the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) would repeal section 14A of the Land Compensation Act 1961.

Let us be clear: the amendments propose to repeal a power introduced by the last Conservative Government, in which the hon. Member served and in which he voted for the specific piece of legislation containing the power.

The power allows acquiring authorities to take forward certain types of scheme by compulsory purchase and to pay a reduced value for land where it will deliver clear and significant benefits and is justified in the public interest. The hon. Member's amendments do not seek, as proposed in the Bill, to limit the extension of the power to parish and county councils or to the use of compulsory purchase powers as they apply to Natural England. The amendments seek to repeal a power contained in a piece of legislation that he voted for, and it is frankly embarrassing to listen to him try to explain that sharp U-turn.

To support the delivery of the housing and infrastructure that this country desperately needs, we must make better use of underutilised land across the country. We know that many local authorities share this objective, but their plans are often frustrated by unrealistic compensation expectations on the part of landowners. This can result in significant amounts of developable land remaining unused and overpriced, with the result that the building of homes, transport links and schools becomes prohibitively high.

Chris Hinchliff: In the debate today, Conservative Members have robustly defended the principle of paying landowners the uplift from the current-use value to the value that land would have with planning permission. Given how Winston Churchill said such unearned increments in land are “positively detrimental” to the general public, are they not attacking their own best traditions?

Matthew Pennycook: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a shame that the Conservative party has seemingly changed its view. [Interruption.] The shadow Secretary of State said, “Yes, that's right. We've changed our view. It was a bad piece of legislation.” Many provisions in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 were some of the best introduced by the previous Government. There is lots in the previous Government's record that Conservative Members should rightly feel embarrassed about; these powers are not among that. Far from removing that power, we want acquiring authorities to use the power. For that reason, we cannot possibly accept the hon. Member's amendment.

Gideon Amos: The hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) suggested that market value would not be paid for such land in compulsory purchases. Will the Minister confirm that the amount paid in compulsory purchases is the market value for the existing use of that land?

Matthew Pennycook: The Liberal Democrat spokesman tempts me to stray beyond the specific measures in the Bill and how that power can be used. We are clear and have recently issued guidance about how that power can be used.

That leads me helpfully to amendments 68, 88 and 89, which would expand the LURA power in question. Sympathetic as I am to the more frequent removal of hope value from the assessment of compensation, the use of the relevant power must be proportionate and

justified in the public interest so that it does not fall foul of article 1 of the first protocol to the European convention on human rights. Seeking to expand the use of the power beyond that test and apply it much more widely is problematic for that reason. I cannot accept the amendments on that basis.

However, I want to make it clear to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) that use of the direction power can be sought on mixed use schemes that include sports or recreational uses, but within those schemes there must be education provision, health provision or affordable housing provision to justify the use of the power in the public interest. On that specific point, and to respond to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, I confirm that clause 104 does not extend the LURA power to other uses or social objectives; it merely enables parish and town councils to make use of the existing power.

Munira Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will not give away any more. I want to bring our remarks to a close because, as hon. Members are aware, there is a statement to follow our proceedings on the Bill.

I turn to new clause 85, which would change the lost payments regime under the Land Compensation Act 1973. To be clear, lost payments are an amount of compensation paid to eligible claimants to reflect and recognise the inconvenience and disruption caused by CPOs. They are an additional payment to compensation claimable under the Land Compensation Act 1961 for the market value of land or property taken by compulsory purchase. The new clause would allow claimants to claim compensation for the market value of their interests twice, and result in over-compensation being paid. That would be disproportionate. It would also run counter to the established, overriding principle of equivalence in compensation law where a person subject to compulsory purchase should be left no better or worse off in financial terms after an acquisition than they were before. On that basis, we cannot accept the new clause.

I will touch briefly on new clause 42 in the name of the other shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), regarding loss payments. It would introduce a change to the loss payment compensation regime under the Land Compensation Act 1973, increasing the amount that occupiers of buildings or land subject to a CPO would be entitled to and placing them on an equal footing with owners. As we discussed at some length in Committee, the Bill already achieves in part what the hon. Gentleman is seeking in the new clause as it increases the loss payment compensation due to occupiers of buildings and land.

The purpose of loss payments is to reflect the inconvenience caused by compulsory purchase. It is occupiers, rather than investor-owners, who bear the greater burden in that respect: they are the ones who will need to close or relocate their businesses. Loss payments are a separate head of claim from compensation paid for land taken under compulsory purchase. The Bill rebalances loss payment compensation to allow occupiers to claim a higher amount and landowners to claim a lower amount. We believe that the rebalancing of loss payment compensation in favour of occupiers is the right approach and will benefit, for example, groups

such as tenant farmers, for which Opposition Members have made a case in this afternoon's debate. On that basis, I am afraid that we cannot accept the amendment and I request that the hon. Member does not press it.

5 pm

Lastly, the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) made a case for greater support for active travel schemes that are to be considered in the public interest for the purposes of CPO. We are extremely keen to support local authorities to use their CPO powers in the public interest and have already published guidance on the compulsory purchase process, including advice on how local authorities can demonstrate the compelling case, in the public interest, for use of their CPO powers. We will also publish updated guidance to reflect the reforms being implemented through the Bill.

In addition, CPO powers can already be used, as the hon. Gentleman made clear, for active travel routes and can be executed by local authorities as part of their wider statutory functions. To assist authorities in deploying those powers more effectively, Active Travel England, which as he knows is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Transport, is developing guidance to support local authorities in the design and delivery of active travel routes. That will be published in consultation with local authorities in due course.

Even though the hon. Member for Henley and Thame seemed to suggest that he knew the content of that publication, let us examine the details in due course when it is brought forward and published. Given that the guidance on the CPO process already exists and, as I have said, further guidance is set to be published by Active Travel England, I believe the amendment is unnecessary and I cannot accept it.

To conclude, the amendments proposed today are, in the Government's view, either unnecessary or detrimental to the objectives of the Bill. More widely, on other parts of the Bill and areas on which we have received fair challenge, we will of course continue to reflect on whether the legislation can be further strengthened and improved. When it comes to development corporations and compulsory purchase order reforms, we think that the Bill, as amended in Committee, is robust and effective. On that basis, I hope the whole House can get behind the Bill this afternoon.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 73, Noes 312.

Division No. 220]

[5.1 pm

AYES

Allister, Jim	Dance, Adam
Amos, Gideon	Darling, Steve
Aquarone, Steff	Davey, rh Ed
Bennett, Alison	Davies, Ann
Berry, Siân	Denyer, Carla
Brewer, Alex	Dillon, Mr Lee
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Cane, Charlotte	Easton, Alex
Chadwick, David	Farron, Tim
Chamberlain, Wendy	Foord, Richard
Chambers, Dr Danny	Franklin, Zöe
Chowns, Ellie	George, Andrew
Coghlan, Chris	Gibson, Sarah (<i>Proxy vote</i>
Collins, Victoria	<i>cast by Anna Sabine)</i>
Cooper, Daisy	Gilmour, Rachel

Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Harding, Monica
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Lake, Ben
 Lockhart, Carla
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian
 Maynard, Charlie
 Medi, Llinos
 van Mierlo, Freddie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward

Morgan, Helen
 Murray, Susan
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Sabine, Anna
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Sollom, Ian
 Stone, Jamie
 Taylor, Luke
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Will Forster and
Tessa Munt

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Tahir
 Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 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
 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
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil

Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 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
 Easton, Alex
 Eccles, Cat

Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 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
 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*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 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
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 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
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morris, Joe
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee

Platt, Jo
Powell, Joe
Poynton, Gregor
Prinsley, Peter
Quigley, Mr Richard
Race, Steve
Ranger, Andrew
Rayner, rh Angela
Reader, Mike
Reeves, rh Ellie
Reid, Joani
Rhodes, Martin
Richards, Jake
Rigby, Lucy
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robertson, Dave
Robinson, rh Gavin
Roca, Tim
Rodda, Matt
Rushworth, Sam
Russell, Sarah
Rutland, Tom
Ryan, Oliver
Sackman, Sarah
Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Scrogham, Michelle
Sewards, Mark
Shah, Naz
Shanker, Baggy
Shannon, Jim
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Slinger, John
Smith, Cat
Smith, David
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Sarah
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Stainbank, Euan
Stevenson, Kenneth
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Will
Strathern, Alistair

Strickland, Alan
Stringer, Graham
Sullivan, Kirsteen
Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Swallow, Peter
Swann, Robin
Tami, rh Mark
Taylor, David
Taylor, Rachel
Thomas, Fred
Thompson, Adam
Toale, Jessica
Tomlinson, Dan
Trickett, Jon
Tufnell, Henry
Turley, Anna
Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Karl
Turner, Laurence
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Melanie
Wagh, Paul
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Williams, David
Wilson, rh Sammy
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Anna McMorrin and
Gerald Jones

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 85

COMPENSATION PAYMENTS

“(1) The Land Compensation Act 1973 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 30 (amount of home loss payment in England and Wales)—

(a) in subsection (1)—

(i) omit ‘10 per cent of’;

(ii) omit ‘subject to a maximum of £15,000 and a minimum of £1,500.’

(b) omit subsections (3) and (4).

(3) In section 33A(2) (basic loss payment), omit from ‘payment of’ to the end of subsection (2) and insert ‘the market value of his interest in the dwelling.

(4) In section 33B (occupier’s loss payment: agricultural land)—

(a) in subsection (2), omit from ‘payment of’ to the end of subsection (3) and insert ‘the market value of his interest in the dwelling’;

(b) omit subsection (3).”—(Kevin Hollinrake.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 314.

Division No. 221]

[5.14 pm

AYES

Allister, Jim
Anderson, Lee
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Burghart, Alex
Cartlidge, James
Cleverly, rh Sir James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh David
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Easton, Alex
Evans, Dr Luke
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
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Kruger, Danny
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John

Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Lopez, Julia
Lowe, Rupert
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mayhew, Jerome
McVey, rh Esther
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Pochin, Sarah
Pritchard, rh Mark
Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Rankin, Jack
Robertson, Joe
Robinson, rh Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stuart, rh Graham
Swann, Robin
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Wild and
Mr Richard Holden

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abbott, Jack

Abrahams, Debbie
Akehurst, Luke
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas

Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 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
 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
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 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
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 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
 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*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 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
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam

Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 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
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrie-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
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morris, Joe
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan

Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scroggum, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thompson, Adam
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl

Turner, Laurence
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Melanie
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew

Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Anna McMorris and
Gerald Jones

Olney, Sarah
Perteghella, Manuela
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Pochin, Sarah
Ramsay, Adrian
Robinson, rh Gavin
Sabine, Anna
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Sollom, Ian
Stone, Jamie

Swann, Robin
Taylor, Luke
Tice, Richard
Voaden, Caroline
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wrigley, Martin
Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Will Forster and
Tessa Munt

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 114

DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS TO PROVIDE GREEN SPACES

“A development corporation must provide or facilitate the provision of—

- (a) green spaces, including private gardens, balconies, and community gardens;
- (b) the care and maintenance of the green spaces provided for under this section.”—(*Gideon Amos.*)

This new clause would ensure development corporations include provision for green spaces in new developments.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Could the Serjeant at Arms investigate the cause for delay in the No Lobby?

The House having divided: Ayes 78, Noes 309.

Division No. 222]

[5.27 pm

AYES

Allister, Jim
Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Lee
Aqarone, Steff
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Siân
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Cane, Charlotte
Chadwick, David
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chambers, Dr Danny
Chowns, Ellie
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Cooper, Daisy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Ann
Denyer, Carla
Dillon, Mr Lee
Easton, Alex
Farage, Nigel
Farron, Tim
Foord, Richard
Franklin, Zöe
George, Andrew

Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
Gilmour, Rachel
Glover, Oly
Goldman, Marie
Gordon, Tom
Green, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Heylings, Pippa
Jarvis, Liz
Kohler, Mr Paul
Lake, Ben
Lockhart, Carla
MacCleary, James
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Martin, Mike
Mathew, Brian
Maynard, Charlie
Medi, Llinos
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Murray, Susan

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Akehurst, Luke
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ali, Tahir
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
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
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
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Byrne, Ian
Caliskan, Nesil
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Irene
Campbell, Juliet
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carden, Dan
Carling, Sam
Carns, Al
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Charters, Mr Luke
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Coyle, Neil
Craft, Jen
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Paul
Davies, Shaun
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
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
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Ellis, Maya
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
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*)
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francis, Daniel
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*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 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
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 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
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris

McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morris, Joe
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle

Sewards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan

Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Anna McMorrin and
Gerald Jones

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 109

COMMENCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

Amendments made: 120, page 148, line 31, leave out “7” and insert

“(Examination of applications for development consent)”.

This amendment provides that the new clause inserted by Amendment NC69 comes into force by regulations.

Amendment 121, page 150, line 24, leave out “section 49 comes” and insert

“sections 48 and 49 come”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment provides that section 48 (which enables regulations to be made imposing a surcharge on planning fees) comes into force two months after Royal Assent.

Third Reading

King’s and Prince of Wales’s consent signified.

5.45 pm

Matthew Pennycook: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has been a real privilege to take this crucial piece of legislation through the House—“groundbreaking legislation”, as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), described it earlier. I thank everyone who has played a role in getting the Bill to this stage. I thank my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for her unwavering support throughout the Bill’s passage; I thank the Department’s Bill team, led by Alex Bush, for their prodigious efforts over many months; I thank my consistently excellent private office, including its head, Grace Doody, and my brilliant private secretary Gabe Allason; I thank the Clerks, Chairs and parliamentary counsel for facilitating the Bill’s progress;

I thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee; and I thank the hon. Members on both sides of the House who provided valuable input and challenge, today and at earlier stages.

This landmark Bill will get Britain building again, unleash economic growth, and deliver on the promise of national renewal. It is critical in helping the Government to achieve their ambitious plan for change milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England during the current Parliament, to making planning decisions on at least 150 major economic infrastructure projects, and to supporting the clean power 2030 target and transforming Britain into a clean energy superpower.

As the House will know, the Bill will deliver five key objectives. First, it will deliver a faster and more certain consenting process for nationally significant infrastructure projects. This is a crucial part of the Bill. Upgrading our country's economic infrastructure—electricity networks, clean energy sources and public transport links—is essential to basic services and a growing economy. The Bill makes a number of changes. It will ensure that national policy statements are kept up to date by providing for a reflective amendment process so that the Government can quickly make minor policy changes or factor in legal impacts.

Secondly, the Bill adopts a more strategic approach to nature recovery that will unlock a win-win for development and the environment. As we discussed at length yesterday, the status quo is not working. It is not working for development, and—let me be clear—that is because constraints such as nutrient neutrality are stifling development and disincentivising planning applications across the country, which is having an impact on house builders, particularly small and medium-sized house builders. We need to remove those constraints. The status quo is also not working for the environment: all too often, the site-by-site process of assessment and meeting obligations is not driving nature recovery. Instead of retaining that suboptimal status quo, we want to take forward a new strategic approach across wider geographies, ensuring that Natural England presents plans that go beyond offsetting harm to driving nature recovery as well as unlocking development.

Thirdly, the Bill will improve certainty and decision making in the planning system. There has been widespread support for the measures on mandatory training for local councillors and on fee localisation. Local planning authorities, which we know have been hard-pressed in recent years, will be able to set their own fees and ensure that more of the burdens that they face in processing applications can be covered by those fees. The House has welcomed that.

We have taken the decision to introduce a national scheme of delegation. I appreciate that that is controversial, but we think it is an absolutely necessary means of introducing more certainty and clarity into the decision-making process. We have launched a technical consultation on the measure, and I urge hon. Members from across the House to engage with the detail of that consultation. I think that when they do so, they will understand that a category of planning applications should be delegated to expert local planning officers. However, with the agreement of the relevant chair of the committee and the lead planning officer in the authority, it will always be possible for the most serious and controversial

applications to come before elected members, just as it should be the case that they take decisions on the most significant applications.

Fourthly, we are unlocking land and securing public value for large-scale investment. Today we have debated changes to development corporations, which will play an essential role in driving the delivery of more large-scale communities across this country, and we have discussed CPO powers. We want to see those CPO powers, including the very important CPO reforms passed by the previous Government, which I am sad to hear the Conservatives regret they passed—the shadow Secretary of State said very clearly from the Dispatch Box that it was a mistake. We think those powers are useful, and we want to see their application taken forward. The Bill makes targeted changes to those powers to ensure that they can be used by parish and county councils and, when it comes to nature recovery and the production of environmental delivery plans, by Natural England in certain circumstances.

Fifthly, the Bill introduces effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning. We must do planning on a larger than local scale if we are to get the best outcomes, and the Bill introduces new spatial development strategies. These are not big local plans; they are higher-level strategies for different sub-regions of the country to come together and decide, in co-operation, the most appropriate places for housing growth and the best way for infrastructure to be delivered across those areas. In response to feedback, we made a series of targeted changes in Committee: we are removing the statutory pre-consultation requirements from the NSIP regime, which we know are driving perverse outcomes, and we have introduced targeted improvements to the nature restoration fund and a new funding mechanism for statutory consultees.

When it comes to delivering new homes and critical infrastructure, the status quo is patently failing the country and the British people. We can and must do things differently, and this Bill will enable us to do so. It is transformative. It will fundamentally change how we build things in this country and, in doing so, help us to tackle the housing crisis and raise living standards in every part of the country. This Labour Government were elected on the promise of change, and we are determined to deliver it. Through the measures introduced by this Bill, we will do just that. I wish Baroness Taylor and Lord Khan all the best with progressing the Bill in the other place, and I commend it to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

5.52 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): May I thank the Minister for all his hard work? He is an incredibly decent and polite man. He may be misguided at times, but we cannot agree on everything. I thank him and his team for all their work, and I thank my shadow ministerial team who did a fantastic job of subjecting the Bill to line-by-line scrutiny, the other Front-Bench teams, the Committee and the Clerks. I also thank hon. and right hon. Members from across the House for their contributions.

We are told that this Bill is about accelerating house building, unleashing growth and meeting a national target of 1.5 million homes in England alone in this Parliament.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

On the face of it, those aims are worthy, but what price are we prepared to pay for the Deputy Prime Minister's ambition? Make no mistake: what is being proposed could fundamentally and irrevocably alter the character of our towns, our villages, and the green and pleasant land that makes Britain what it is.

This is not an attack on new homes—I am unashamedly pro-business and pro-development. Unlike the Secretary of State, the Minister and half the Cabinet, I have never objected to a housing development in my constituency. Let me be clear: we need homes. We need homes for first-time buyers, for young families, for key workers and for the next generation, but we need the right homes in the right places, shaped by the right principles. Instead, we are being offered a top-down model driven by arbitrary targets and central diktat. The result is soulless settlements, identikit developments and rows of uninspiring concrete boxes that bear no relation to the history, the heritage or the hopes of the communities they are built in.

Crucially, in the Government's "centralising zeal"—as the excellent shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), calls it—local voices are being sidelined. Local councillors, and those who live in, love and understand their communities best, are being cut out of the process, with their role reduced and their judgment overlooked. The individual has been subordinated to being a cog in the machine. The Bill in its current form is not just flawed, but dangerous. It risks eroding trust in the planning system and widening the gulf between the Government and the governed.

The Bill must be considered in conjunction with the changes to the national planning policy framework. The Government's approach of shifting housing targets from urban areas to rural areas is cynical and economically illiterate. While I welcome the restoration of mandatory targets in principle, raising targets by up to 400% in rural areas while simultaneously reducing them by over 11% in London, 30% in Birmingham and Newcastle, and over 50% in Coventry is unfair and wrong-headed. Their grey belt policy—presented as a few disused garage forecourts and wasteland in green belts—is a con. What they have actually done is remove important protections that prevent villages from merging into nearby villages and towns.

Of course, there is also the matter of the environment. Anyone who cares about our natural world knows that once a habitat is destroyed, a woodland torn up or a biodiverse landscape bulldozed, no cheque can bring it back. There is zero confidence on this side of the House that Natural England can successfully mitigate the significant environmental harms that will ensue through the environmental delivery plans. That is why we propose that they be delivered locally through local or strategic plans.

The truth is that we cannot concrete our way to community, we cannot meet our housing needs by overriding the very people we are building for, and we cannot call it progress if the Bill leaves our countryside degraded and our communities disempowered.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): Residents in Bexley village in my constituency—it is one of London's outer villages—are particularly concerned about the erosion of their green areas around the village.

Does my hon. Friend share my concern and surprise that, when the outer London green belt issue was discussed in the London Assembly last week, Reform backed Mayor Khan in building over the green belt? Reform backed Khan against the interests of Bexley residents.

Kevin Hollinrake: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and the failures of the London Mayor to build more houses are well documented. What is perhaps not a surprise is that Reform would take the further step of supporting the London Mayor in the pursuit of Labour votes.

We have grave concerns about the enhanced compulsory purchase order powers for councils, mayors and even Natural England, without hope value or market value. This undermines one of the most important principles of our economy: property rights. Not only is this unfair, but it will face legal challenge after legal challenge in the courts.

During the passage of the Bill, we attempted to work with the Government to make sensible changes to make it fit for purpose, but to no avail. Let us not be seduced by false choices. We do not have to choose between development and democracy, between homes and heritage, or between ambition and accountability. We can build and we must build, but we must do so in a way that listens, respects and safeguards.

I urge the Government, yes, to be ambitious, but also to think again. They should rethink the Bill, and restore the local voice and reinstate environmental protections. Let us chart a path to progress that honours our need for homes, our obligation to communities and to the environment, and our duty to future generations. In its current form, we cannot support this Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

5.59 pm

Gideon Amos: It has been an honour and a privilege to represent the Liberal Democrats at the pleasure of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in Committee and at all stages of the Bill. I thank my staff team for their work and my colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches for their spirited amendments across all topics; in fact, we put forward 78 amendments in Committee, which I can only imagine was an absolute joy for the Minister and his officials to respond to.

I pay tribute to Members across the House for their work on this Bill. It has stimulated amendments from all corners of the House, as well as great debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) working with the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Peter Prinsley) on their amendment on rural housing exception sites, to give just one example of the cross-party approach from different corners of the House towards improving the Bill.

On Second Reading, where the Liberal Democrats were the only party—except Plaid Cymru—to vote against the Bill because of our principled concerns about it, we set out to address our concerns about people's rights, communities and fairness, and the effects the Bill will have on nature. We sought to address all those topics with our amendments.

First, on rights for people and individuals, as the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi), pointed out yesterday, what greater right could there be than the right to a decent, affordable home to bring up one's family? We championed our proposal for 150,000 social homes a year to be built as a key target for this Government, and continue to encourage them through all means, including votes in this place, to move towards a target for building social homes, rather than simply a target for building millions of homes; without that, the target will be led by private market housing, which, on its own, is no solution to the problems we face.

We sought to address communities and fairness by seeking to remove the power that the Government will grant themselves, and all future Governments, to interfere in the running of councils and to give decisions to employees and planning consultants over and above the heads of the councillors who employ them, and who are meant to be accountable for those decisions. For the first time, decisions could be made by council officers and consultants, and, though every single elected councillor of that authority may disagree, those decisions will stand in their name, and councillors will not have the power to do anything to change them. That cannot be right.

It will undermine communities' trust in politics and our planning system—a system in which people engage more at a local level than perhaps any other aspect of local government. The more people see the centralisation of planning powers, the standard method and guidance written by Whitehall, the appeals process dominated by Whitehall, and now even their own councillors not allowed to make decisions, the more we will damage communities' trust in politics and their belief in the planning system and the system of local democracy, which is so important to our country. That is the principal reason that we object so strongly to the removal of powers from councillors in the Bill.

We support a number of the measures in the Bill; there are many good measures. In passing, I pay tribute to the Minister for his work on bringing back strategic planning, on which he has worked for a number of years. However, we are gravely concerned about its effect on nature. The National Trust has called the Bill a “licence to kill nature”. It is right, of course, to bring in a system for phosphates, for instance, which could be mitigated at a strategic level through environmental delivery plans, but it is wrong to completely remove from that process the principle of “first do no harm” on the site on which we are developing. We should enshrine the mitigation hierarchy in this new system in the Bill, so that, first, we seek to avoid harm to the site, then to mitigate it and, finally, to offset it, but only where that is absolutely necessary. Our new clause 1 would have put that protection of nature into this new system.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I am sure my hon. Friend knows his legislation very well, but the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 stated that Ministers have a duty to further the purposes of protected landscapes such as national landscapes. Does he think that we have missed an opportunity in this Bill by not giving national landscapes a seat at the table as statutory consultees, like, for instance, Chichester harbour in my constituency?

Gideon Amos: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who has done so much work to champion national landscapes and the need for them to have a seat at the planning table. In my own national landscape, the mellow and beautiful Blackdown hills of Somerset also deserve a seat at the planning table. We do not believe that cutting out consultees, consultation and voices such as Sport England from the planning process is the way to deliver more homes or better communities. We need to bring in voices such as those who support our national landscapes, and we would dearly like to put forward amendments to achieve that.

On the rights of people to genuinely affordable homes, the rights of communities to fairness in the process, and rights to nature, we do not believe that the Government have gone far enough and we cannot support the Bill as it stands.

6.5 pm

Wendy Morton: Fear not, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall keep my comments very, very brief. I cannot let this Planning and Infrastructure Bill go without saying that it was an opportunity to create the homes that we need, to support our communities, to support our farmers and farming, to support the environment, and to ensure that good development is supported by good infrastructure. I have sat in this Chamber for two days listening to amendments and debating amendments, including my own on battery energy storage systems. Time and again, the Government have just rejected them. What we have ended up with is legislation that drives a coach and horses through accountability. It seeks to steamroll over local people and to concrete over our precious green belt. It gives local people no rights, no voice and no say over how their communities are shaped for the future. On that basis, I will be voting against the Bill on Third Reading.

6.7 pm

Richard Foord: I, too, will keep my remarks brief, but I wish to put it on the record that Devon, which is rightly celebrated across Britain for its rugged coastline, its rolling farmland, its spectacular moorlands and its ancient woodlands, is subject to the diggers of developers who are encouraged by this Government. Although we all need houses and we all need the protection that they afford, this Bill, if enacted, will only damage nature. Nature in Devon is part of who we are and we face a nature crossroads. The Devon Local Nature Partnership tells us that the loss and decline of Devon's wildlife has accelerated rapidly over the past 50 years. The wooded valleys of the Blackdown hills and the wildflower meadows of East Devon are priceless, but once they are gone, they cannot be brought back.

Yesterday in the Tea Room, we were talking about the darkening clouds of the international system and how this Government are having to deal with such grave matters of state. Somebody then pointed out that, never mind grappling with wars and conflict, we cannot even create a system where a £44 swift brick is put in a new house to encourage nature in our rural areas.

Healthy natural systems underpin our economy and our communities, but unless we restore nature, we will have nothing left. Building homes does not need to come at the cost of nature. We must build in the right places with nature embedded at the heart of planning.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 174.

Division No. 223]

[6.9 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Baivia, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Benn, rh Hilary
 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
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Cans, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 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
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 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
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 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
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morris, Joe
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 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
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Kim Johnson*)
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren

Swallow, Peter
Tami, rh Mark
Taylor, David
Taylor, Rachel
Thomas, Fred
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Adam
Toale, Jessica
Tomlinson, Dan
Trickett, Jon
Tufnell, Henry
Turley, Anna
Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Laurence
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
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 Ayes:

**Anna McMorris and
Gerald Jones**

NOES

Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Lee
Andrew, rh Stuart
Aquarone, Steff
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Siân
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Burghart, Alex
Cane, Charlotte
Cartlidge, James
Chadwick, David
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chambers, Dr Danny
Chowns, Ellie
Cleverly, rh Sir James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Dance, Adam

Darling, Steve
Davies, Ann
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh David
Denyer, Carla
Dillon, Mr Lee
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Easton, Alex
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, Ollie
Goldman, Marie
Gordon, Tom
Grant, Helen
Green, Sarah
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harding, Monica

Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heylings, Pippa
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Jarvis, Liz
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Kruger, Danny
Lake, Ben
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Lopez, Julia
MacCleary, James
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Malthouse, rh Kit
Martin, Mike
Mathew, Brian
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Charlie
McMurdock, James
McVey, rh Esther
Medi, Llinos
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Susan
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil
Olney, Sarah
Patel, rh Priti

Paul, Rebecca
Perteghella, Manuela
Philp, rh Chris
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Pochin, Sarah
Pritchard, rh Mark
Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Ramsay, Adrian
Rankin, Jack
Robertson, Joe
Robinson, rh Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Sabine, Anna
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
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
Swann, Robin
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Voaden, Caroline
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Wrigley, Martin
Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:

**James Wild and
Rebecca Smith**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

6.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The two-state solution is in peril. There is catastrophic conflict in Gaza and a shocking deterioration in the west bank. This is an affront to the rights of Palestinians, but it is also against the interests of Israelis; against their long-term security and their democracy. Today I will update the House on new actions we are taking to uphold human rights and defend the vision and viability of two states living side by side in peace.

In 2024 we saw the worst settler violence against Palestinians in the west bank in the last two decades, and 2025 is on track to be just as violent. Between 1996 and 2023, an average of seven illegal settler outposts were established annually. In 2024, settlers erected 59. These outposts are illegal under both Israeli and international law. Two weeks ago, the Israeli Government themselves announced 22 new settlements in the west bank. Every outpost and every building the settlers erect is a flagrant breach of international law and disregards the views of Israel's international partners. There are now in excess of 500,000 settlers living in the west bank and over 100,000 in East Jerusalem, the territory that must form the heart of a sovereign, viable and free Palestine.

The sharp growth in settlements alone is dangerous enough, but it has been accompanied by a steep rise in settler violence and extremist rhetoric. Itamar Ben-Gvir has led seven provocative intrusions into Haram al-Sharif since 2022. In 2023, settlers rampaged through the village of Huwara, in what Israel's own west bank military commander described as a "pogrom done by outlaws". Last month, the villagers of Mughayyir al-Deir fled their homes in fear after the construction of an illegal outpost 100 metres away. This month, settlers attacked the town of Deir Dibwan. They set fire to houses and injured residents. This violence and rhetoric are deeply concerning. They are an assault not just on Palestinian communities but on the very fundamentals of a two-state solution. This is an attempt to entrench a one-state reality where there are no equal rights.

The two-state solution remains the only viable framework for a just and lasting peace—and I know that it is supported on every side of this House—with Israelis living in secure borders, recognised and at peace with their neighbours, and free from the threat of terrorism; and with Palestinians living in their own state, with dignity and security, free of occupation.

We are steadfastly committed to defending that vision, not just with words but with action. That is why we have pledged £101 million in additional support to the Palestinian people this year, and why we are working to strengthen and reform the Palestinian Authority. It is why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary signed a landmark agreement with Prime Minister Mustafa, and why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister welcomed him to Downing Street. It is why we are clear that Hamas must release the hostages immediately and unconditionally, and that Hamas can have no role in Palestinian governance. It is also why we are committed to working with civil

society, Israeli and Palestinian, to support those who believe in peace and coexistence. However, the gravity of the situation demands further action.

The reality is that these human rights abuses, the incitement to violence and the extremist rhetoric come not just from an uncontrolled fringe but from individuals who are Ministers in this Israeli Government. We must hold them to account and protect the viability of the two-state solution. So today we are sanctioning Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir. We are acting alongside Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway, which have also announced their own measures today.

These two men are responsible for inciting settler violence against Palestinian communities in the west bank—violence that has led to the death of Palestinian civilians and the displacement of whole towns and villages. That violence constitutes an abuse of Palestinians' human rights. It is cruel, it is degrading, and it is completely unacceptable. We have told the Israeli Government repeatedly that we would take tougher action if this did not stop. It still did not stop: the appalling rhetoric has continued unchecked; and violent perpetrators continue to act with impunity and encouragement.

Let me tell the House that when we say something, we mean it. Today we and our partners have shown extremists that we will not sit by while they wreck the prospects of future peace.

Our actions today do not diminish our support for the security of Israel and the Israeli people. The agendas of those two men are not even supported by the majority of Israelis, who recognise that those individuals are not working in their interest. As the Foreign Secretary said to this House last month, we want a strong friendship with Israel based on shared values and our many close ties. Our condemnation of Hamas—a proscribed organisation—and of the appalling attacks of 7 October is unequivocal. Our commitment to the security of Israelis and the future of Israel is unwavering. We will continue to press for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, for the release of the hostages still held so cruelly by Hamas, and for a ramping up of aid to those Gazans in desperate need. The repeated threats by Hamas to the lives of the hostages are grotesque and prolong the agony of their families and loved ones. Hamas should release all the hostages immediately and unconditionally.

The situation in the west bank cannot be seen in isolation from events in Gaza. Extremist rhetoric advocating the forced displacement of Palestinians, the denial of essential aid, and the creation of new Israeli settlements in the strip, is equally appalling and dangerous. This Government will never accept the unlawful transfer of Gazans from or within Gaza, or any reduction in the territory of the Gaza strip. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains catastrophic. As Israel's ground and air operations expand, Gazans have now been pushed into less than 20% of the territory. Hospitals have been damaged and destroyed. The entire population of Gaza is now at risk of famine.

Meanwhile, Israel's newly introduced measures for aid endanger civilians and foster desperation. They are inhumane. The Red Cross field hospital in Rafah reported last week that it has responded to an unprecedented five mass-casualty incidents in the two weeks prior. In each case, Palestinians have been killed or injured trying to

access aid in Gaza. Desperate civilians who have endured 20 months of war should never face the risk of death or injury simply to feed themselves and their families.

We need further action from the Israeli Government now to lift all restrictions on aid, to enable the UN and aid partners to do their work, and to ensure that food and other critical supplies can reach people safely wherever they are. We will continue to support the UN and other trusted non-governmental organisations as the most effective and principled partners for aid delivery. Our support has meant that over 465,000 people have received essential healthcare, 640,000 have received food, and 275,000 have improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene services.

We of course support the efforts led by the United States, Qatar and Egypt to secure an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. We welcome the initiative of France and Saudi Arabia to chair an international conference next week to advance a two-state solution. A two-state solution is the only way to bring the long-lasting peace that Israelis and Palestinians deserve, but it cannot remain an empty slogan repeated by generations of diplomats and politicians while increasingly divorced from the reality on the ground. Mr Smotrich has said there is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. Mr Ben-Gvir has spoken of his rights in the west bank—a territory that his Government are occupying—as being more important than the rights of millions of Palestinians. Their own words condemn them.

To defend those Palestinians' rights, to protect the two-state solution and to see Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in safety and security, this Government are taking action. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

6.35 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for advance sight of his statement. As he said, the situation in the middle east and the suffering we see is serious and completely intolerable, and I reiterate what I said in response to the statement last week about this desperation and suffering being completely unacceptable. We continue to see violence, deaths and casualties, including near aid distribution centres, which is incomprehensible and should simply never happen.

Britain has continued to leverage its influence with Israel and our international allies at every opportunity to change the course of the events that the world is witnessing—to ensure that the remaining hostages are released, that aid reaches those who need it and that a sustainable end to this conflict is achieved. We all want a better future for the Israeli and Palestinian people, and the UK must continue to play a leading role in achieving that. To do so, the UK needs to have constructive channels of communication open with all our partners in the region, as we work towards peace and an end to this conflict, and that includes dialogue with Israel.

The sanctioning of individuals is always under review, which is the right policy, and in the case of Israel, that was previously considered by Lord Cameron, who spoke about it in the last Government. Will the Minister explain the timings of this decision, and can he give an assessment of the impact that the sanctions will have? I have read the Foreign Office statement on asset freezes,

travel bans and director disqualifications, and these measures will have the right effect only if we work with allies. The statement refers to action being taken with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway. Can the Minister tell us what discussions he has had on this issue with other partners, including the United States of America, and their response?

Given this decision and others that are being taken, can the Minister give his honest assessment of the UK Government's relationship with Israel? What direct communication have he and the Foreign Secretary had with Israel on securing the delivery of vital, lifesaving humanitarian aid to people in desperate need of help?

As the Minister heard last week, the Opposition have been clear that settler violence is not helpful at all; it is taking things backwards when it comes to delivering the two-state solution. We again urge Israel not to take steps that could make the two-state solution even more difficult. We have consistently been committed to a two-state solution, delivered in the right way and at the right time, and we will work constructively to support every effort to achieve this.

Can the Minister provide an update on the progress being made with the Palestinian Authority on reforms, following the memorandum of understanding that was signed in April? The House will understand that credible governance is needed for long-term stability in the west bank and Gaza, and of course, that means no future role for Hamas.

More widely, the reports on the latest rounds of negotiations on hostage releases and bringing an end to the conflict are frustrating for us all; there has not been the progress that we all desperately want to see. Can the Minister provide an update on the direct discussions he is involved in, including with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Qatar and other allies in the region? The remaining hostages, held in captivity by the Iranian-backed terrorists, have faced over 600 days of suffering in horrific conditions, and securing their release continues to be critical to seeking an end to this conflict.

We all want to see aid get into Gaza, to the innocent Palestinians who are suffering. We have discussed the need for vital food, medicines and shelter in previous statements, and I completely recognise and understand the difficulties associated with getting aid in. Can the Minister provide an update on the amount and types of aid that the UK continues to support and fund directly through partners, where that aid is, and the efforts to get it in?

The House will know, as I said in response to the Minister's statement last week, that my noble friend Lord Cameron previously worked with the Israeli Government and with allies to secure aid, and to open up crossings and ports, and so increase the number of trucks and the volume of aid entering Gaza. Will the Minister confirm that, working with our partners, he has spoken to or presented a clear plan to Israel that supports more aid going in, and an increase in the volume of aid? Will we make use of our long-standing experience? Obviously, Britain leads the world on getting aid; we have expertise and a strong track record.

Finally, will the Minister give an update on the actions being taken to restart dialogue and discussions on the viability of the Abraham accords, and on progress in delivering the Cairo plan? As the House knows, the Cairo

[Priti Patel]

plan is important because it is backed by local and regional allies, and it gives the Egyptian Government a pivotal and vital role in securing peace in the region. Those are essential conditions that we need to meet to create peace, stability and a better future for Israel and Palestine.

Mr Falconer: I thank the right hon. Lady for her questions. She raises important points about work with allies. Let me address what she said about Egypt, which is vital. The Egyptians have conducted important work, and I am pleased that I will be with them next week at the two-state solution conference to discuss the reconstruction of Gaza. She is absolutely right that we need to focus on working with partners in the region and beyond to ensure that vital building blocks are put in place for a reformed Palestinian Authority and a rebuilt Gaza. We can all see how acute that need is.

I am grateful to the Speaker and to colleagues for their flexibility this evening, as we deliver this statement in a slightly unusual way. We have sought to work with partners, and to co-ordinate closely with those who are part of this statement. We are also co-ordinating with others. We have had direct discussions with a range of partners, including the United States, about some of these questions.

We have spoken to the Israeli Government directly today. The right hon. Lady invites me to comment on the state of the relationship between the UK and Israel. The state of disagreement is clear. I regret the tone of some of our exchanges most recently. We do not wish to have such a profound disagreement with the Israeli Government, but when we disagree as profoundly as we do, then I am afraid that as Minister for the middle east, I have to say so both publicly and privately, and that is what I have done.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I have long called for comprehensive sanctions on Israel in response to its crimes against the Palestinian people, so the sanctions against two far-right Ministers are a step in the right direction, but Israel's war crimes are about far more than a couple of bad apples, so much, much more needs to be done. When Russia invaded Ukraine, over 2,500 sanctions were rightfully imposed on Russia, so I say to the Minister, is it not time for Russia-style sanctions on Israel to help stop the genocide?

Mr Falconer: I want to be really clear that the two men against whom we have announced sanctions today do not represent the majority of Israelis. There are so many connections between the UK and Israel, and we hear about the extent to which the decisions, rhetoric and language of those two Ministers cause concern in Israel as well. We are taking action on extremist rhetoric and extremist actions that threaten the human rights of Palestinians, and that continues to be the threshold for these sanctions, which we will keep under review.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I also thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement. I welcome the step taken by the Government to sanction the extremist Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. It is only right that they face consequences for their relentless calls for the forced dispossession of Palestinians, which

have so egregiously undermined prospects for securing a just and sustainable peace in the region. My party leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), was the first to call for these sanctions last February, when the Ministers' extremist views were already clear. My only disappointment is that the Conservatives refused to act when they had the chance to do so, and that it has taken this Government nearly a year to take this important step.

It is essential that the Government keep taking steps towards a just resolution of the conflict. That must include getting aid in, getting the hostages out, and agreeing an enduring ceasefire. In the last week, we have seen the product of the extremism advanced by Ben-Gvir and Smotrich: the death of more Palestinians, who were queueing in desperation for food from the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. Calls for Palestinian displacement can no longer be tolerated, so will the Government build on today's progress by urgently considering sanctions on other extremist Ministers who continue to call for the blockade of Gaza and for expanded military action in the strip, starting with Israel Katz?

The time has come to listen to Members in all parts of this House and officially recognise the independent state of Palestine. Will the Government commit to taking that vital step at next week's summit in New York? Recognition will demonstrate the UK's commitment to self-determination, and will make it clear that, building on today's announcement, the UK will do all it can to wrest control away from the extremes and give both Israelis and Palestinians hope of a lasting peace.

Mr Falconer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions. The two-state solution conference next week is an important moment. We are discussing with our friends and allies our approach to that conference, and no doubt I will return to this House next week—with your permission, Mr Speaker—to discuss that further. I will not speculate on further sanctions from the Dispatch Box. We have taken these steps because of the extremist rhetoric and the damage that these two men have done to Palestinian human rights, and we will keep further sanctions under review.

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): I very much welcome the statement from the Minister. It is absolutely right to target the enemies of peace in the Netanyahu Government; their will is entirely separate and different from the will of the Israeli people. I very much welcome the Minister's reference to supporting civilised society in Israel and Palestine, and it is true that there can be no top-down two-state solution without building those communities. Will the Minister update the House on the UK's proposals for an international fund for Israeli and Palestinian peace?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend from the east midlands. He has long been committed to these issues, and particularly to the difficult but vital work of ensuring that civil society in Israel and Palestine works on peace-building projects. I know that he was in the region recently, and I commend him for his approach. We hope to set out our approach to the international fund in due course, following the announcements of the Prime Minister. We want to make as full a contribution as we can to bringing peacemakers on both sides of this conflict together.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, I have tried for two days to raise this issue through an urgent question. When the Minister came to the Dispatch Box, I expected to hear something constructive; what we have actually heard about is the sanctioning of two people. The United Kingdom Government could unilaterally recognise Palestine and show the world that they are taking the lead. Above all, they could, as an absolute priority, negotiate the delivery of food, water and medicine to women and children in Palestine who are starving through the route from Larnaca directly into Gaza. I asked the Minister last week, and I will ask him again: when are the Government going to do something?

Mr Falconer: In this House, we have to be focused on what the real options are for getting aid at volume into Gaza. The truth is that it must be done via land routes, and even when aid gets into Gaza by land, that is still incredibly dangerous for aid workers. Ultimately, deconfliction mechanisms for aid workers in Gaza will be vital, should a full aid operation be again allowed in the strip. I met this week with the bereaved families of the victims from the World Central Kitchen operation. There were three British veterans lost while trying to deliver aid to the people of Gaza, and three British families are still mourning the loss of their loved one at the hands of the Israel Defence Forces. If there was some other option to get aid into Gaza safely, we would take it. No such option exists. We have to negotiate access with the Israeli Government, and that is what we seek to do.

Abtisam Mohamed (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions announced today, which are long overdue and signify an important step forward. I thank the Minister for his hard work and strong statement on the issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Earley and Woodley (Yuan Yang) and I were denied entry by Israel into the Occupied Palestinian Territories precisely because we spoke out against war crimes in Gaza and against annexation in the west bank. Annexation is real—it is happening. Partners in the region are calling for recognition before it is too late.

Today the US ambassador to Israel reiterated what many fear: that the US will not prioritise a Palestinian state becoming a reality in our lifetime. Does the Minister agree that we must not throw recognition into the long grass, that failure to recognise next week at the UN conference implies that Israel does have a veto, and that the Israeli Government will continue to annex and terrorise Palestinians in the west bank? If we do not recognise now, there will be no Palestinian state to recognise. Does the Minister agree that we must recognise a Palestinian state at the UN conference next week?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for her commitment to these issues. Clearly, recognition is right at the centre of any discussion of a two-state solution. The actions we have announced today are part of the UK's efforts to ensure that the reality of a two-state solution remains in play. It is clear from the rhetoric of the two Ministers we have sanctioned, as well as others in the Israeli Government, that there is limited commitment on the side of the Israeli Government to advancing that cause. The UK is committed to advancing that cause, and we will talk to our friends and allies in the run-up to the conference next week.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I have absolutely no sympathy with the comments and rhetoric of the two Israeli Ministers that the Minister has announced sanctions on. In his statement, the Minister said clearly, “we will not sit by while extremists wreck the prospects of future peace”. If the action he has just announced is not to be seen as a double standard, where are the sanctions against Ministers within the Palestinian Authority who have incited violence and made vile comments of hatred against Jews and Israelis?

Mr Falconer: As I am afraid I say with regularity, I will not speculate on further sanctions on either side of the conflict from the Dispatch Box, but the hon. Gentleman is right that the thresholds and tests are the same. We condemn antisemitic rhetoric, we condemn incitement to violence, and we will keep all sanctions under review.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The sanctions imposed on the two Israeli Ministers are long overdue, but a welcome first step. I continue to ask the Minister and the Foreign Secretary: why are we still arming Israel, when will we impose an arms embargo and when will we ban goods from settlements? Finally—the Minister has already alluded to this—the conference on the two-state solution in New York next week is a crucial moment in the recognition of a Palestinian state. The Minister has the opportunity at this Dispatch Box to share with the House that the UK Government are committed to recognising Palestinian statehood. Will he do so?

Mr Falconer: I feel that I need to take issue with the idea that this is the first step that this Government have taken in relation to these issues. I have been at this—

Marsha De Cordova: In relation to sanctions.

Mr Falconer: It is not the first step in relation to sanctions either; this is the third set of sanctions we have announced in relation to settlements in the west bank. On the two-state solution conference next week, we are talking with our friends and allies. I am sure that—with your permission, Mr Speaker—I will be back in this House next week to talk about that.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross has said that in Gaza, “humanity is failing”. What is happening in Gaza surpasses any acceptable legal, moral or humane standard. Palestinians are being stripped of their dignity. When will the Minister pronounce that they have a state, and given that Israel continues to blockade Gaza, what more will he do? He talks about first steps—he needs to run.

Mr Falconer: It was not me who talked about first steps. We have taken a sequence of measures, and we will continue to take measures. The blockade of aid into Gaza is reprehensible, and I have talked about the famine that faces the whole of the strip. The steps we have taken today will not unlock aid into Gaza. We will continue to advocate, to press, and to take further measures until aid into Gaza is unlocked.

Yuan Yang (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I stand with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Abtisam Mohamed). She and I were denied entry to Israel only two months ago, and one of the reasons given

[Yuan Yang]

was our advocacy for the sanctions that the Government have introduced today. I stand by my comments and by the Government's decisive action today. As the Minister has mentioned, it is important that this action has been taken to uphold the rights of Palestinians. The UK, along with its international allies, can take further action by recognising the state of Palestine. What more can the Minister do—and what more can all of us in this House do—to press our international allies to come to that decision collectively?

Mr Falconer: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's contribution. She went to the region to see with her own eyes, as she did repeatedly as a much-respected journalist and author before she came to this House. I know her commitment to these issues, and I can assure her that we are talking with the full range of our friends and allies about the approach to the two-state solution conference next week.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I welcome the Minister's statement, but can he tell the House whether he thinks these sanctions will save a single Palestinian life? If he will forgive me, ahead of the Palestinian recognition summit—rather than the two-state solution summit; maybe that was a slip of the tongue by the Minister—next week in New York, some observers looking at today's statement might be suspicious that there is a cynical coincidence in its timing. Can he reassure the House, and all those who are very concerned about this issue, that the United Kingdom Government have not done some grubby deal behind the scenes with the American Administration, trading today's set of sanctions for saying no to recognition in New York next week?

Mr Falconer: I called next week's conference what it is called by the French and Saudi Arabian authorities. I can confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that I have done no deals, grubby or otherwise; we take sovereign steps on this issue.

The right hon. Gentleman has asked about timing. As I know many Members will appreciate, working in concert with our allies and making a joint announcement of this kind requires some co-ordination. I was in the Chamber last Wednesday, when I was understandably asked by many Members when I would be in a position to announce further steps. I would have liked to have been in a position to announce further steps earlier than I have been, but we have always taken the view that it is most powerful to act with our allies. As such, we took the time to enable us to work in concert with them.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Many of us have been consistent in our calls for sanctions against those who commit war crimes in Gaza, so the sanctions placed on these two far-right Ministers today are a step in the right direction. But let us be clear: this is nowhere near enough. Palestinians starve and aid is blocked in flagrant violation of international law while the UK continues to allow arms exports to Israel. We cannot condemn the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza while continuing to arm those who contribute to it. The Government must act now and end all arms sales to Israel. Anything less is not just a failure of diplomacy; it is an absolute failure of moral leadership in the face of a genocide.

Mr Falconer: Let me be really clear for the House: we are not selling arms—not bombs, not bullets—for use by Israel in Gaza. We have a carve-out in the F-35 programme in order to maintain the programme, which we and so many of our allies benefit from, but where F-35 parts were directly being sold to Israel, that trade is suspended. We are not providing the weaponry that is being used in Gaza. I reassure my hon. Friends that I and the Government do not think that the actions we have taken today will be the golden answer to getting aid into Gaza. They will not be the golden answer for securing a ceasefire. We will continue to work on all those fronts until we achieve progress.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): Although we welcome the sanctioning of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, that should have happened a long time ago, and we now need to go much, much further. Further to the previous question, today's announcement highlights the absurdity of the Government's position. The Foreign Secretary recently described those Ministers' views as "repellent" and "monstrous" and today's statement accepts that Israel is guilty of human rights abuses and is in flagrant breach of international law. On what basis—legal or moral—can the Government continue to supply F-35 components, knowing that the end user will be a regime that they themselves have condemned for espousing repellent and monstrous views, and which they now accept is guilty of human rights violations and is in flagrant breach of international law?

Mr Falconer: For the purposes of time, I will not address the legal questions, not least given that they are being considered by a judicial review. We are confident that the limited carve-out we have done to maintain the functioning of the F-35 programme, which is vital to our national security and that of so many of our allies, is legal, proportionate and moral, and we will continue to fight that case in court.

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement. It is a huge and significant step that sends a clear message to the Israeli Government. However, millions of people in Gaza go to bed every night, if they can even find a bed to sleep on, unsure whether they will wake up in the morning and whether their family members, who might have survived so far, will wake up with them. Does the Minister agree that we must take the next vital step towards the two-state solution, which is for the UK to recognise the state of Palestine next week at the conference that France and Saudi Arabia are leading on?

Mr Falconer: I will not repeat my answers about the conference next week, but my hon. Friend has been committed to these issues for a long time, and she is absolutely right when she says that millions of people are in an abject position, facing famine and terrible shortages of all essential supplies, and they weigh very much on the mind of this Government each and every day.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The two Israeli Ministers that the Minister has announced are being sanctioned are no friends of the Israeli people or the Palestinians. I have no truck with them and nor should any of us. The reality is, though, is that there are two aspects to the situation. There is Hamas's continued control of Gaza, and their refusal to release the hostages

or agree to a hostage exchange, or indeed to allow aid in and let it reach the Palestinian people. There is also the challenge of releasing those hostages, which we all want to see happen. Hamas have refused the ceasefire deal. What action will the Minister take to ensure that Hamas come to the negotiating table and actually negotiate a ceasefire, so that international aid can get in? And while I am on my feet, what is the Government's attitude towards those who attempt to break the blockade, such as the *Madleen* ship?

Mr Falconer: I called on Hamas to return to ceasefire talks when reports reached us that they were not doing so. I hope that those ceasefire talks are successful, and I of course repeat my call for hostages to be released. We have been clear about the blockade of aid, but I must once again reiterate that it is the land routes on which we must be completely focused; the land routes from Egypt, from Jordan and from Israel itself must be opened at the scale required to get the aid in.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement, and I thank the Government for the sanctions that they have imposed. I appreciate that allies must work together and that it takes time to hold negotiations and put out joint statements—which are, I agree, more powerful—but I would find it helpful to be able to tell my constituents and the country what the Government's position will be as they go into the negotiations in America next week. Will their offer be, “Yes, we should recognise Palestine immediately,” and if not, why not?

Mr Falconer: I recognise the strength of feeling among constituents throughout the country, including those in the city of Lincoln. We go into the two-state solution conference clear in our commitment to the Palestinians' inalienable right to a state that is safe and secure, alongside Israel, and we are talking to our friends and allies about the best method of securing that.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): The Government's decision to sanction two Israeli Ministers is certainly welcome, but does the Minister acknowledge that every limb of the Israeli state is carrying out a genocide against the Palestinian people of Gaza? Sanctions must be extended to the entire state of Israel—not tomorrow, not in a week's time, not in another 18 months' time—alongside a full arms embargo and the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador.

Mr Falconer: The hon. Gentleman is aware of the long-standing position on determinations in respect breaches of international law and crimes. I want to make it clear that our sanctions do not target the entirety of the Israeli people. They target two individuals who have been promulgating extremist rhetoric and action and have breached the rights of the Palestinians, and it is on that breach of rights that we are focused.

Tahir Ali (Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley) (Lab): We have been here nearly every week talking about these issues. The sanctions are welcome, but every speaker is sending the Minister the clear message that we should recognise the state of Palestine. If we do not recognise the state of Palestine, there will be no Palestine to recognise. My question is this: what is preventing that

recognition from happening, especially given that the UK is among 50 countries that do not recognise Palestine? Do we need the permission of Netanyahu or any member of his Government to recognise it? If not, and if we are independent in making this decision, it should have been made long ago.

Mr Falconer: I can confirm that we do not need any permission to make policy decisions. I think that if we did, the Israeli Government would have a rather different attitude towards Britain's Minister for the Middle East.

The position in relation to recognition is that we wish to provide a state in which Palestinians can live safe and secure, side by side with the Israelis. That looks distant at the moment, for the reasons that my hon. Friend has given. Those reasons need to be addressed. We want to see progress, and we will consider our own position as part of the best possible way in which we can make a contribution.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Sanctions are no remedy when it comes to the imperilled two-state solution. Is the Minister going to the conference with a plan?

Mr Falconer: The right hon. Gentleman always asks succinct and clear questions. As he will recall, I was a diplomat for a long time. Sanctions are no remedy; they are an expression of a failure in the international system. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley (Tahir Ali) said, we have heard week after week about the agonies. We do go to the conference with a plan, but it is a conference called by our friends and allies, and we are discussing our approach closely with them.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister, and his team and officials, on all that they have done. I do not underestimate the amount of work that has been put in, especially the work with our international allies that has brought us to where we are. As the Minister can see, however, there is always a demand for more, as there should be given what we know is going on. May I add my voice to those of all who have said that hopefully this is the lead-up a successful announcement next week, with our allies, about recognition of the Palestinian state?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words about both me and officials in the diplomatic service, who have worked tirelessly. As I said in response to another hon. Member, I had hoped that we could make this announcement even sooner, but it is through no fault of those in the hard-working British diplomatic service, who have done everything they can to ensure that we make the most impactful sanctions announcement possible.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The two sanctioned Ministers have been enabled by Prime Minister Netanyahu, who is himself subject to an International Criminal Court arrest warrant, and I wonder what the Government will do to make sure that that is properly pursued. When I was in the west bank only a week after the two Labour Members were shamefully deported, it was very clear that the settlements are taking over. What sanctions will the Government take to ensure that there is no trade with those settlements?

Mr Falconer: The settlements are not bound by the trade preferences between the UK and Israel, and products must be properly labelled. They attract different tariffs and should be traded as such. Where there are breaches of those regulations, they should be investigated.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions announced today by the Minister, which have been taken in conjunction with our allies, and his commitment to a Palestinian state. However, people in Gaza are starving. I want to update the Minister on one such person: Dr Radi, the elderly and frail father of my constituent Mo Radi. A few weeks ago, Dr Radi sought shelter in Al-Awda hospital with over 100 medical staff and patients, as he is a former practising doctor there. No food was allowed in, and the IDF destroyed the main water tanks. The hospital was bombed, and when Dr Radi left the hospital, he was stripped and humiliated by the IDF. He is now hungry, ill and alone, as the rest of his family in Gaza have been killed. What are we doing to protect the most vulnerable from dying? We need to increase aid and evacuations, and to end the killing in Gaza.

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend describes the heartbreaking case of her constituent's family member, which she has raised with me on a number of occasions. Members from across the House have done the same, and I am usually not in a position to discuss such cases on the Floor of the House. Where constituents and their families are affected, we will do everything that we can to try to support them. We have heard a great deal about the restrictions on aid, and it is candidly not easy to support people to leave Gaza, but where there is a UK connection, I am always keen to do what I can to try to secure people's safety.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I wholeheartedly welcome the Minister's statement and the sanctions, but I fear that those who have just been sanctioned will either shrug their shoulders and say, "So what?", or, worse, wear them as a badge of honour among their cohort.

Casting forward to next week's conference, is the Minister alert to and seized of what is a very significant development in this place, which is the near-unanimous support for a positive declaration from His Majesty's Government on moving towards a two-state solution and the recognition of Palestine? That would be a very big step forward, and I hope the nuance of the comments made by my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary is not lost on the Minister. He will know that my right hon. and hon. Friends from across the spectrum of the Conservative party have written twice to the Prime Minister to urge that course of action, and to pledge that we will give wholehearted and full-throated support to such an initiative. I just hope the Minister knows that when he and officials go to the conference, he is armed with the good will of this place to give some dynamism and impetus to the process, to recognise Palestine, to show leadership, and to use our good offices among our allies in the region to bring this utter torture to an end as quickly as possible.

Mr Falconer: I am a proud son of the Labour party and I have mostly attended to developments in my own party, but the many forceful interventions from the Opposition Benches on these questions have not escaped me. The many powerful speeches, particularly from

those who previously held other views, are important contributions. I know they are watched widely by our friends and allies across the world, and indeed by many in Israel, and I take full and sober note of them.

Henry Tufnell (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for his statement, and for the work he has done and continues to do on this issue. The people of Pembrokeshire watch in despair the events unfolding on their TV screens—the death, the horror, the humanitarian catastrophe. I add my voice and my constituents' voices to those urging the Minister that we need two states for a two-state solution, so when will the Government recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for the question, and I recognise the strength of feeling in Pembrokeshire, Lincoln and so many other places. I will not repeat for him the manifesto commitment on which we were both elected. I am sure his interest, like that of so many in this House, will be on the conference next week, and we are of course talking with our friends and allies about our approach to it.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): An 11-year-old constituent wrote to me, and simply said,
"why are we not doing more?"

That sums up the outrage in Yeovil at the crisis in Gaza. Can the Minister tell my constituent what steps he has taken with allies to ensure that all aid routes to Gaza are reopened, and what consequences there will be if they are not?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Gentleman's constituent asks a perfectly reasonable question. I often feel frustrated in this House by my inability to say what we are doing diplomatically with our allies and partners, which I cannot always advertise on the Floor of the House as we are doing it. I am sure it was obvious to many Members during the statement last week that work was ongoing on this package of sanctions, and I understood the frustration of so many Members, which I am sure is shared by his 11-year-old constituent, that I could not say more then. I would like to reassure them and the House that, whenever we are not in this place, we are working with our friends and allies behind the scenes to try to reopen aid routes, secure the release of hostages and ensure a two-state solution.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): The sanctioning of Smotrich and Ben-Gvir is welcome news, not least because theirs are the loudest voices calling for annexation of the west bank. The settlement building and forced displacement of Palestinians are accelerating, and surely it is time to recognise Palestinian sovereignty over the 22% of mandate Palestine that remains to them, before that too is entirely eaten away.

Mr Falconer: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an important and powerful contribution. I will not repeat the position on recognition, but we recognise the force of what he says, which is that the situation has deteriorated, settlements have increased very significantly over the last year, as has settlement violence, and it is unacceptable.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): It is a sad day when the UK Government and the Governments of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and

Norway feel it necessary to sanction Government Ministers in the state of Israel, one of our closest allies, but it is the right thing to do. Can I, however, counsel the Minister, if I may be so presumptuous, against performative politics, and ask him how many mouths will be fed, how much violence against Palestinians in the west bank will be avoided or averted, and how much closer are we to achieving the two-state solution that we all want to see as a result of the action he has announced today?

Mr Falconer: As my predecessor, the right hon. Gentleman can, of course, counsel me, and I am grateful for his support on the measures we have taken. As I said to another of my predecessors, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), I recognise that sanctions are not a remedy: this will feed no Palestinians. I hope it will deter, but we have no guarantees that it will save any Palestinian lives. However, we think these are important statements of principle and actions that demonstrate not just to the two individuals, but to Israeli society, where we stand on these questions.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Many of us have urged this course of action on the Government for some time now, and the imposition of sanctions on these two individuals and others in the Israeli Government is something that is, perhaps, over time. However, I very much welcome the Minister's statement this evening and the hard work that has gone into getting us to this point. I understand the importance of working in concert with our allies, but if the co-operation of our allies is not forthcoming, will the UK Government, given the strength of feeling across the Chamber, unilaterally recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I will not speculate too far on hypotheticals, but I am, of course, a British Minister; I take decisions on behalf of the British Government. We will act alone where we have to, but we act whenever we can with our friends and allies, as that is the way we have the greatest impact.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): The Minister has laid out with some passion the dystopian hell that Gaza has become and the unfolding and ongoing disaster in the west bank. Why, then, as many Members have asked, has he done the absolute bare minimum? We all know in this House, after the previous rounds of sanctions, that there will be absolutely no difference on the ground for the Palestinians. I said last week—I am sorry to be cynical about it—that I thought the House was being played. My confident prediction now, given this announcement, is that recognition, which was being advertised for the conference next week, is off the table. Can the Minister tell me that I am wrong?

Mr Falconer: I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman has made these points with some force for the past year, but I would caution him against being quite as cynical as he is. We are doing everything we can. We recognise that what we have announced today will not be a remedy to the situation we find ourselves in, as I have just said to one of my predecessors, the right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison). However, I encourage the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) not to cast such cynicism around the Government's motives. This Government care deeply about what is happening in Gaza. We are so

incredibly frustrated by the scenes that meet us and everyone on the Benches behind me. I say gently to the right hon. Gentleman that he has no monopoly on the morality of the situation.

Frank McNally (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for coming to the House tonight and for the steps that have been taken, given the despicable actions of the two Israeli Ministers cited throughout the statement. Of course, more must be done. Does the Minister recognise the UN special rapporteur's characterisation of Israel's approach to aid delivery as "brutal humanitarian camouflage"? What further measures will the Government take to challenge grotesque attempts to use aid as a cover for ongoing violence towards Palestinians, including further sanctions and, critically, the recognition of a Palestinian state?

Mr Falconer: We have been very clear about the nature of the new aid arrangements involving the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. It has proven deadly and incapable of supplying aid at the levels so desperately needed. I have said so repeatedly, and we will continue to make these points with force.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Regardless of what one may think of the views expressed by the two Ministers who are subject to sanctions today, the fact is that this is nothing new—they have been saying it for a long time without sanctions. The question that must be asked today is: why now? The Minister must know that this will not bring peace to Gaza, and it will not stop Israel pursuing the terrorists it is bound to pursue in order to free the hostages and release its grip on Gaza, with the danger that presents to Israel. Is this a case of the Minister pandering to the increasingly loud anti-Israel voices on his Back Benches, and does he not know that this will only encourage Hamas not to release the hostages and not to agree to a ceasefire?

Mr Falconer: I have spoken about the perilous decline of the situation in the west bank and, indeed, the events of the past two weeks. I have also spoken about the importance of co-ordinating with allies, so I do not think that I have anything further to say about the timing of the announcement.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): The Government are right to sanction these Israeli Ministers whose encouragement of mass atrocity crimes is an outrage. Further, such action must follow quickly. Also an outrage is the news of starving Palestinians being shot and killed by Israeli soldiers and foreign mercenaries as they try to access aid in Gaza. Let me ask the Minister this: as the fabric of Palestinian life is being destroyed by the Israeli military, and if the two-state solution is not to be an empty slogan, as he says, then is this not the time for our country to unconditionally and immediately recognise the state of Palestine? If this is not the time, when is?

Mr Falconer: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her work as the chief executive of Medical Aid for Palestinians. I recognise that there is almost nobody in this House who has more lived experience of what this crisis looks like. I will not add to my answers on recognition or on the conference next week, but I pay tribute to her work, which was brave, courageous and important.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): Restrictions on aid, fuel, food and even water in Gaza is inhumane and unacceptable. If the Minister cannot get a decision next week to recognise the state of Palestine, will he at least ask for a collective message to be sent to our allies, the Israelis, that these restrictions are unacceptable and that, unless they are reversed, serious consequences will follow?

Mr Falconer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We have delivered that message with our 26 partners on aid and we have been clear that, unless the situation changes, further actions with the leaders of France and Canada will flow. I will not repeat my answers about the conference next week, but I thank him for the important focus that he puts on the humanitarian situation.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): I warmly welcome today's decision by the UK Government to work with other international allies to sanction these extremist Israeli Ministers. Just to remind ourselves how extremist they are, Finance Minister Smotrich promised that "not even a grain of wheat"

will enter the Gaza strip. This is a man whose extremism and disregard for the Israeli hostages are matched only by his absolute contempt for Palestinian lives. He said that it is "good" that the war has begun but "unfortunate" that it started the way that it did. "Unfortunate"—that is how he described 7 October. In the spirit of today's international alliance with other countries, will the Government now seize the moment to recognise the state of Palestine next week in New York?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend is very committed to these issues. He rightly points to some of the rhetoric and extremist language that has been used by these two men. I will not repeat my answers in relation to the conference next week. We will work with our friends and allies on our approach.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): The Foreign Secretary summoned the Israeli ambassador to meet the Minister two weeks ago and we were asked to "wait and see" what positive steps would come from the meeting. Since then, we have seen violence and attacks on vulnerable people increase by the state of Israel. The ambassador has repeatedly rejected a two-state solution. Given that 200,000 people have now signed a petition to expel her from this country, has the Minister given any consideration to further action on the ambassador?

Mr Falconer: I summoned the Israeli ambassador and set out the strength of views to the Israeli Government that the British Government feel on these questions. It is of vital importance that we have an Israeli ambassador. Whatever the views of this House, it is important that we maintain relations. We also have an ambassador from Iran in London, and that is important, too. We need to be able to deliver messages to friends, to allies and to those with whom we do not enjoy good relations. We will continue to host ambassadors because of the importance of maintaining those diplomatic relations.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): The Minister was absolutely right: our dispute and anger is not with the Israeli people but with their leaders, who use their murderous forces to inflict this

annihilation on the Palestinian people. The Minister has said that sanctions are not remedies, and that they are an expression of our opinion, but the acid test will be whether the measures actually have an impact and bring about the end to the killing.

I also have to respectfully disagree with the Minister, because as a state party to the genocide, Geneva and Vienna conventions, the UK has a binding obligation to: prevent genocide; refrain from recognising, aiding or assistance an illegal situation arising from serious breaches of peremptory norms of international law; and avoid trade, funding or co-operation that enables or legitimises these violations. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give an undertaking to this House to come back in short order to announce further sanctions that will concentrate their mind, because the fear is that these sanctions will not? Will he also indicate whether, in the absence of a firm commitment to recognise the state of Palestine, His Majesty's Government will support a vote in this House, by other means, to express the will for that recognition of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I have come to this House on a number of occasions to talk about a number of things the British Government have done in relation to this situation. I say that sanctions are no remedy; they are no remedy in this situation. They are so often not a remedy in the many circumstances in which we apply them. I feel much greater satisfaction when we announce positive steps that we have taken—aid that has gone in, partnerships with the region. It is with regret, always, that we announce sanctions. I will not speculate on what further we may introduce in this case or any other, as my hon. Friend will understand. I recognise the limitations of sanctions, but under these circumstances, the Government judged that we had no choice but to express the strength of our feeling through sanctions. On the questions of international humanitarian law, I repeat once again this Government's commitment to abiding by all our IHL obligations.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I have spoken on a number of occasions in recent weeks about recognition of Palestine, and I put on record again that I think we should proceed with it. Certainly, a vote in this House, as was suggested a moment ago, would strengthen the Government's position and, I would have thought, be helpful in international negotiations. The Minister mentioned four other countries that have sanctioned the two Ministers today. Is he anticipating that further countries will follow suit, and what negotiations are taking place to achieve that goal?

Mr Falconer: We have had discussions with other countries, but I would not wish at the Dispatch Box to speculate on what steps they may take following this.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I recently visited Israel and Palestine on a delegation and met Opposition leaders, and their top ask of the UK—what they said would be helpful for them—was strong sanctions, so I welcome the Minister's statement today, but does he not agree that we should be placing strong sanctions on all Ministers in the Israeli Government? This is not just about rhetoric; it is about actions. With thousands of deaths in Gaza, we need to see stronger sanctions on all Ministers in the Israeli Government.

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for the effort she put in to travel to the area and to meet those in Israel and beyond. To be clear, the sanctions announced are not sanctions on the two Ministries that the men represent. They are sanctions on the men themselves and the extremist rhetoric that they are responsible for. We would keep further sanctions under review on individuals who conducted rhetoric of that kind.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I welcome the sanctions that have been announced on these two individuals, but I believe that they should go further. The Minister said in his statement that no arms are now going to Israel, but he was unclear about the component parts for F-35 jets, which are still in the global supply chain and presumably could be bought by Israel, and he was silent on the use of RAF Akrotiri and the flights that overfly Gaza. Is security co-operation with Israel continuing? Is information being given to Israel that it can use to continue the disgraceful and disgusting bombing of starving people in Gaza?

Mr Falconer: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to clarify that the British Government are not providing information to enable the bombing campaign in Gaza. The decisions that we took in relation to arms suspension bind the whole Government—they are not just the decisions of the Foreign Office—and represent a sober, reasoned, serious analysis of the risks of breaches of international humanitarian law, and they bind the Government in our approach. I will take brief issue with the right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of my remarks, because I have been clear on the F-35 point. We continue to be clear on that point. Indeed, we have explained it at length in court.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I thank the Minister for coming to the House to make the statement and for the strong action that the Government are taking to make it clear that we hold no truck with extremists who care nothing for peace, but we must go further. He will know the strength of feeling on the Labour Benches on this issue, particularly on recognition of a Palestinian state. I reimpress that on him and hope that he will be here in a fortnight's time as the Minister who recognised Palestine. Will he advise the House on what discussions he is having about the appalling interception of the British-flagged yacht *Madleen*, yet again preventing much-needed aid from reaching the Palestinian people?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. While I am always glad to come to the House, I reassure her constituents and those of many Labour Members that even were I not glad to do so, they would certainly summon me. I am always glad to answer questions from my hon. Friend, and indeed from hon. Members on both sides of the House. In relation to the *Madleen*, I confirm that the UK pressed the Israeli authorities before its arrival to ensure that any action taken was in line with international law, would be undertaken with restraint and would be resolved safely for the passengers on board.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): Next week, I will be meeting the families of some of the remaining Israeli hostages. I am sure that the whole

House wants to see their safe return, and wants peace at last for the Palestinian population of Gaza and the west bank. The killing, the misery, the starvation and the genocide have gone on for far too long. Will the Government do the right thing by recognising the state of Palestine now? For a two-state solution, there must be two states.

Mr Falconer: I will not rehearse the arguments on recognition, but I know that so many hon. Members, myself included, have met hostage families who view the events with terrible dismay. I will not put words in their mouths from the Dispatch Box. Their views are varied, their distress and their anger are palpable, and we have them in our thoughts every day.

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for coming to the House for the statement and the announcement of sanctions. We have all watched with horror the scenes of desperate people trying to access food—the most basic thing that we need to survive. While we can understand why our constituents have a sense of hopelessness, we should not have that in this place, because we have considerable agency. What steps is he taking, with allies and aid organisations, to establish secure maritime corridors for humanitarian aid to Gaza? Does he agree with me and hon. Members across the House that now is the time to recognise an independent sovereign state of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I welcome the tone and spirit of my hon. Friend's question. We do have agency in this House. The frustrations that are felt by so many, both within and without the House, are completely understandable and justifiable. This Government have sought change and have been frustrated by how slow that change has been, but we will continue to work for a better situation for those in Gaza, for those in west bank and, of course, for those in Israel.

My hon. Friend asks about maritime corridors, which are an important but, ultimately, relatively peripheral part of any aid operation if it is to be at the scale required. There were maritime corridors supported in an earlier phase of the conflict and they did important work, but ultimately the three road crossings into Jordan, Egypt and Israel are the most practical, most viable, and most tried and tested routes to get aid in at the scale and with the flexibility required to meet the needs of those in the strip.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I welcome the announcement of sanctions on two extremist Ministers. It is long overdue and it is a bare minimum. On its own, it is likely to do little to stop extremist, illegal settlements and violence against Palestinian civilians. When will the Government implement a ban on settlement goods to stop the economy that fuels illegal settlements? Will the Minister today, clearly and unequivocally, call for illegal settlements to be dismantled, as the International Court of Justice has directed?

Mr Falconer: I will not repeat the answer about settlement goods that I gave earlier, but I want to be absolutely clear for the House that settlements are illegal under Israeli and international law and they should be dismantled.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions on Israeli Government Ministers announced today. Those two Ministers have shown the world who they are for a long time and this step, while welcome, is long overdue. The Minister speaks of the peril for the two-state solution. There cannot be a two-state solution that is realised without two states, so will he take with him to the summit next week the clearly expressed will of this House that this Government take a lead in the recognition of the Palestinian state? Also, is it not time for a full ban on settlement goods, so that we can be sure that consumers in this country play no part in a clear strategic attempt to undermine even the possibility of a two-state solution?

Mr Falconer: I have heard the powerful interventions from my hon. Friend and many others across the House on the questions of recognition and settlement goods. The question around settlement goods is one of differentiating between Israeli goods—that is, those from within green line Israel—and those from illegal settlements. Illegal settlement goods are not eligible for the same trade provisions as those from within green line Israel. To breach that labelling requirement and so not be clear where the goods are produced is a breach of the relevant regulations.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): I want to clarify some of the Minister's earlier remarks in response to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) and in his previous answer. The Minister said earlier that the trade in goods from settlements attracts a higher tariff. Will he therefore confirm that the British Government, by raising tariffs and taxes on that trade, are making money out of the illegal settlements in the west bank, and does he think that is acceptable?

Mr Falconer: Not quite—there are trade arrangements between the UK and Israel. We consider Israel to be green line Israel; we do not consider the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the settlements within them to be part of green line Israel. We have separate arrangements with the Palestinian Authority. Goods produced in illegal settlements should be labelled as such. That is not, let me clarify, a money-making scheme for the British Government.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): Having had a number of conversations with the Minister about the importance of the new sanctions, I wholeheartedly welcome today's announcement. Those two Ministers' comments go well beyond what could be tolerated, accepted or explained away, and I am really glad that we have played a leading role in pulling together international partners to take a stand on this. However, as the Minister has pointed out, the humanitarian situation on the ground is getting increasingly dire for Gazans, who have been long deprived of the access to aid that they desperately need, so with this renewed call for international action that he has so clearly laid down today, how are we working with international partners to apply more pressure on Israel to finally get those land routes open and uninhibited flows of aid back to the Palestinian people?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his commitment to these issues and for his important question. As the House will see, the UK has led with 26 of our allies on a statement on humanitarian issues, and with three leaders

from the UK, France and Canada, and today with five others in relation to the sanctions on those two men. I can assure the House that we will work with a range of our partners in different formats in order to achieve the objectives that I know are felt so keenly right across the house.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): Ben-Gvir is so extreme that the Israeli Government themselves banned him from joining the army, and that was three decades ago. So if the Minister will please excuse me, I am not going to extend a warm welcome to this announcement. The fact is that this is a matter of trust. The Government tell us they are going to cease arms sales to Israel, yet F-35 fighter jet parts get to Israel, massacring young children. The Government tell us they are appalled by the actions of the Israeli Government, yet Government Ministers find themselves partying with the Israeli ambassador and Holocaust trivialisers. The Government tell us that they are ceasing trade deals with Israel, yet the very next week a trade envoy is sent to Israel to drum up business. Who are the Government trying to fool?

Mr Falconer: It is a shame that the hon. Member does not feel in a position to welcome these announcements. These are important steps taken with our allies. The UK is leading the world on these issues, and we will continue to do so.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I welcome the actions that the Minister has announced today, but we can no longer allow starving men, women and children to be murdered in cold blood while scrambling for food or visiting cemeteries at Eid, or to be burned alive in their houses. Will the Minister please be bolder, listen to the voices here tonight and lead the way by calling for a state of Palestine, just to give hope to those Palestinians who are already working for peace and the right to self-determination?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend has a long interest in the communities of the region, and I recognise the emotion in her remarks. We have talked this evening about sanctions, about recognition and about aid. Hope will not feed the hungry people of the Gaza strip, and we will not cease until proper aid provision is provided to all those who need it in the strip. I will not repeat the answers I have already given about recognition.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): The sanctions on the appalling extremists Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, while extremely overdue, are welcome—we on these Liberal Democrat Benches have been calling for them for some 16 months now. The Minister acknowledged in his statement that there is cross-party support for a two-state solution. He also said "when we say something, we mean it."

Yet he has repeatedly refused tonight to recognise the state of Palestine or to commit to recognising it at the summit next week. I remain wholly unconvinced by his reasons for refusing to do so, so let me try a different tack. This evening there are reports that the US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, has stated that the US is no longer pursuing the goal of an independent state of Palestine. Will this now bring a new urgency to recognising the state of Palestine and to the UK standing up and assuming its historic responsibility in the region, when Trump is abandoning the Palestinians?

Mr Falconer: I have answered the question about the approach to the conference. I have sought to be as clear as I can with the House about the importance of conducting diplomacy not on the Floor of the House, but with our allies and friends, in advance of such an important moment as next week. That is the approach that we will take.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Ind): I thank the Minister for his commitment to peace, and for his unrelenting and tireless work towards it. A two-state solution must be protected. We cannot let that light—that hope—be extinguished. He is quite right in his comments. Today's strong action is right, and it is welcomed by many of my constituents, but will he get even tougher? Will he get more aid in, stop the settler violence, stop the illegal settlements, and take a message from this House and this country about protecting Palestinians and their right to self-determination?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend has been adamantly committed to these issues. He sets out all the right objectives, and I confirm to him that I take on board that message.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Last October, Lord Cameron said that, as Foreign Secretary, he had been working up plans to sanction extreme right-wing Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. What took the Government so long?

Mr Falconer: I hear many reports of what was being done in the Foreign Office on these questions before I got there. I think the House will probably agree that, since we arrived in government, we have taken rather a different approach across a whole range of questions; we restored funding to UNRWA on my very first day as a Minister and took the other steps that we have discussed at some length. It is very interesting to hear Lord Cameron's recollections, but I am not sure that we will be taking many lessons from them.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): A British surgeon in Gaza described it as a "slaughterhouse", babies are starving, and roads to aid are being described as "combat zones" by the IDF, so I welcome the sanctions on Israeli Ministers, who stated that they are "destroying everything that remains in Gaza".

Their actions bear all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing and plausible genocide. It is clear that the majority of us in this place want to recognise the state of Palestine, as do many of the public. Will the Minister feed back to the Prime Minister our strength of feeling on recognising Palestine now?

Mr Falconer: I know how strongly my hon. Friend feels about these questions, and how strongly Luton feels about them—as do so many in Lincoln, Burnley and elsewhere. I will take that message.

Robin Swann (South Antrim) (UUP): A two-state solution requires all sides to see it as achievable, desirable and sustainable, so what practical steps have the Government taken with international partners to rebuild and support the Palestinian Authority, and how will they ensure that Hamas have no role in Palestinian governance, as the Minister said in his statement?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Gentleman asks a vital question. That was one of the central focuses of the visit of the Palestinian Prime Minister to the UK and the memorandum of understanding that we agreed with him. We welcome the recent statements of the Palestinian Authority on vital reforms, including on the so-called pay-for-slay provisions for welfare, and their statement in recent days that Hamas must have no role in the future governance of Gaza.

Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab): I certainly welcome the sanctions against the two Israeli Ministers, but collective responsibility dictates that the whole Cabinet is complicit, and the sanctions should perhaps have gone further. Human rights abuses are happening right in front of us. Settler violence has reached a record high. Illegal settlements are being constructed. Over 55,000 innocent men, women and children have died. Humanitarian aid is being cruelly withheld. Does the Minister agree that the recognition of the Palestinian state must be the next step?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his commitment to these issues. I will not add to the answers on recognition that I have already given, nor will I speculate further on where future sanctions might be targeted.

Susan Murray (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): People in Gaza are starving. Those people are children, the sick and the elderly. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation is unworkable and its operations are insufficient. Will the Government not just press for but develop an alternative plan for taking aid into the strip through a humanitarian corridor sponsored by the UN?

Mr Falconer: An alternative exists—an alternative that is tried and tested and has been developed over the course of this conflict—and it is called the United Nations and the international non-governmental organisation community. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The UK and its partners already have a model available, ready and waiting. Aid from Britain, among many other places, is waiting in places like al-Arish, close to the border with the strip. That operation must be allowed to proceed.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): Innocent Palestinian civilians face a horrific choice: either they die of starvation, or they risk being killed while they queue up for aid. I welcome the sanctions announced by the Minister, but I want to press him for more detail about his engagement with our international allies on collectively putting pressure on the Israeli Government to allow free-flowing aid into Gaza for those who need it most, and who are in this situation through no fault of their own.

Mr Falconer: As I have said, we have worked with 26 partners on a statement on humanitarian issues, with five partners today on sanctions, and as one of three leaders. We will join our friends and allies at the two-state solution conference next week, and I can assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to work with friends and allies in a variety of formats to press these points.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I pay tribute to the work of my Oxfordshire neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), for her work to try to get Palestine recognised. She has brought forward Bills in this House

[Freddie van Mierlo]

for many years to that effect. I also extend my thoughts to all UK Palestinians living here who fear for their families in Gaza.

Has the Minister tonight heard the House's wish to recognise Palestinian statehood, and will he outline the steps the Government are taking to make sure that baby formula gets through as aid into the strip? Mothers are unable to feed their children, and it is terrifying to watch on TV. I hope he will press on that matter in particular.

Mr Falconer: I of course hear the voice of all parliamentarians who have spoken today, and on the many other occasions when we have had to discuss these issues. Like other Members, the hon. Gentleman presses me on one of many lifesaving items that are not currently going into the strip in the volumes required. They include medical provision, baby food, and the basic nutrition to deal with the famine that the IPC—Integrated Food Security Phase Classification—report warns all those in Gaza are at risk of. There is an urgent need for all such items to get in, and I assure him that we press that point.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions against extremist Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, whose dehumanising rhetoric has contributed to the land grabbing on the west bank and the destructive situation we see in Gaza. I thank the Minister and the Foreign Secretary for co-ordinating internationally on this, because together our actions are more powerful. Will he also co-ordinate on the devastating humanitarian situation, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation and private military contractors? We see civilians walking miles to get food; indeed, some of them are being killed by the Israel Defence Forces while simply queuing to get a meal, despite the state they are in. Will he co-ordinate with his international partners to apply pressure, and to challenge this illegal and cruel mechanism, and what steps will he take next week to ensure that the UK recognises the Palestinian state?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend rightly points to the limitations of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation; its model has proven deadly and incapable of supplying aid at the scale required. We have co-ordinated with our partners in the way that I have described. Next week, with Egypt, we will co-chair a working group on the reconstruction of Gaza, and I assure him, as I have assured other Members, that we will continue to work with our international partners on these questions until the situation improves.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): This Government appear willing to sanction selected Israeli Ministers, while groups that have openly supported the terrorists who carried out the terrorist atrocity on 7 October are being platformed at events like Glastonbury festival. It certainly screams double standards. Sadly, it is the Jewish people in the UK who are left to face the consequences, and who cannot walk the streets of London without being harassed. How can the UK sanction people who do not live here while those who share their hatred walk freely among us?

Mr Falconer: I condemn antisemitism unreservedly, in London or anywhere else. Let me be clear: Hamas—the whole organisation—is proscribed in the UK. When it

comes to Hamas, we do not make the careful differentiation that I have made this afternoon between Israeli Ministers. The whole organisation, lock, stock and barrel, is proscribed by the UK Home Office. That has force under law, and it does not matter whether they are here or not. We continue to call on Hamas to release hostages, to return to a ceasefire, and to have no future role in the governance of Gaza.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): On 23 May, I stood in exactly the same spot where I am standing now and asked the Foreign Secretary to sanction Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, so I thank the Government for their action today. The Palestinian people are now in existential crisis. Even this week, we saw the Israeli military board a British-flagged vessel in international waters and confiscate it. Mass starvation events in Gaza continue, and as the Minister has said, there is increasing settlement action on the west bank. I have been to the region and met senior members of the Palestinian Authority, and I am proud that the Prime Minister took the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority into Downing Street, and that we have a trade envoy to Palestine. The Palestinian Authority is a government under occupation, and has all the effects of government, so what is stopping us from recognising them as the legitimate government of a state? What is the Minister's view of the Palestinian Authority?

Mr Falconer: In our view, the Palestinian Authority is central to a two-state solution. We want to see it reformed and strengthened, and in control of both Gaza and the west bank. The MOU that we signed with the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mr Mustafa, was part of those efforts.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I am grateful to the Minister for his personal efforts to achieve some justice, and for the attempts to get aid into Palestine and Gaza in order to save lives. However, as a new Member, I have been coming to the Chamber for 11 months, riding on the coat-tails of many right hon. and hon. Members who have gone before me, and who are here today, who have been fighting for this cause for many years before I arrived. We have heard only words and rhetoric from the Government; there has been no meaningful action to save lives, beyond the aid that was allowed in earlier. What steps are the Government taking to finally get aid into Gaza, so that we can save the babies, the starving children, the mothers and all of humanity? Otherwise, tens of thousands of people will no longer be here in a few days' time.

Mr Falconer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. The steps that we have taken have been concrete, but he is right that there remain terrible risks of famine and other circumstances that befall people when adequate aid is not allowed in. When proper water and sanitation is not provided, the risks of further humanitarian catastrophe are considerable. We will continue to press those points with the Israeli Government, alongside our friends and allies.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): If the UK Government fail to recognise the state of Palestine next week, what message will it send to the perpetrators of this genocide and to the suffering Palestinians?

Mr Falconer: I do not think I have very much to add on our approach to the conference next week.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): It is vital that we get a clear and accurate picture of what exactly is happening on the ground. That is absolutely essential to ensure transparency. What are this Government doing to progress access for journalists into Gaza?

Mr Falconer: That is a vital question. The hon. Lady knows that journalists and most aid workers are not able to operate in Gaza, which provides considerable uncertainty about the events happening there. We are calling both for journalistic access and the access of aid workers and, vitally, for those people to be protected. More aid workers and many more journalists have been killed than anyone in this House could accept. We want people to be able to go in to deliver aid, to report freely and to be protected through deconfliction mechanisms.

Kirith Entwistle (Bolton North East) (Lab): Every day I wake to news of further atrocities in Gaza, and every week constituents come to ask me to put more pressure on our Government to go further and faster. While I welcome the news of sanctions and I commend the Minister for his hard work, surely this is just the beginning; as he said, the gravity of the situation demands further action. We must ensure accountability for all breaches of international humanitarian law. When will we recognise the state of Palestine? How will we ensure that vital aid reaches people in Gaza, who are beyond desperate?

Mr Falconer: I reassure my hon. Friend's constituents that she does indeed press me on these issues, as do so many Members on my own Government Benches and across the House. I am not sure I entirely agree with her characterisation that this is the beginning, but I assure her that it is not the end until progress is made.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): I certainly welcome the statement from the Minister with the imposition of sanctions on the two Israeli Ministers; although it is late in the day, that none the less requires our gratitude. Given that we have adopted this new precedent, will the Minister agree that any Member of the Knesset using language similar to that of the two Israeli Ministers will receive similar sanctions?

Mr Falconer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and the tone in which he asks it. I will not set out hypothetical circumstances under which we may take further sanction action from this Dispatch Box, but I reaffirm that the question and issue in these sanctions is the breach of Palestinian human rights. That is the basis on which we will consider further sanctions.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I thank the Minister for this important statement, but the reality is that 93% of children in Gaza—around 930,000—face the critical risk of famine. He has outlined what the Government have been doing in the past few months and continue to do, but will he tell us what more the British Government could do to ensure that food and medicine reach people who are starving?

Mr Falconer: I assure my hon. Friend that we are doing all we can to try to ensure that food and medicine reach children and all those in need in Gaza. I will return to this House when I have further announcements.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister is much respected in this House. He has been at pains to emphasise that these sanctions are being placed on the people, not the Government, yet already media headlines out there are creating the image that Israel is being sanctioned. Will he underline and state the unwavering support that Israel has from him and this Government in its battle for survival against continued Hamas terrorism so that there can be no doubt that this nation remains standing with Israel?

Mr Falconer: As ever, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words and his courtesy in this House. I can reaffirm that this Government support the existence of the state of Israel, and we will continue to stand on its defence when required.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and hard work, and I believe he is genuinely concerned about what is happening in Gaza. We all want a two-state solution, a safe and secure Israel, and a sovereign state of Palestine, and we have already said that the illegal settlements of Israel are something that we condemn. We recognise the state of Israel. Can the Minister please give an explanation as to why we cannot now recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and his important question. He knows our commitments to a Palestinian state as set out in our manifesto, and I will not rehearse them. It is our job as the British Government to create the conditions in which a Palestinian state can be viable and sovereign and can live in safety alongside a safe and secure Israel. It is to that task that we continue to put our efforts.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. I welcome the sanctions that have been taken today against Ben-Gvir and Smotrich because their rhetoric and actions towards the Palestinian people are dangerous and extremist. But this is the third set of sanctions imposed by our Government against violent settlers and settlement entities, and they have unfortunately not stopped food being used as a weapon of war. What does the Minister think will stop food being used as a weapon of war, and what more can we do to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered into Gaza as a matter of urgency?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend is exactly right to highlight the importance of aid not being used in service of a military or political objective. It must be delivered in a principled way in accordance with humanitarian principles. The United Nations and our international NGO partners have long experience of delivering aid in that way. That is why I have said over the course of the evening that we have an alternative to the GHF that will work, and that is the UN-supported operation.

Lillian Jones (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement to the House and the steps the UK Government are taking thus far.

[Lillian Jones]

The humanitarian assistance must not be obstructed, politicised or treated as a threat. What concrete steps are the UK Government taking to ensure that aid reaches all areas of Gaza without further delay or interference by the Israel Defence Forces to allow aid workers to carry out their lifesaving work without fear of injury or death, to secure the release of hostages back to their families and to finally recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: On aid provision within Gaza, as I know my hon. Friend will be aware, there has been much discussion on the importance of there being multiple distribution sites far in excess of those currently available. That helps manage the pressures and provides more humane conditions for aid delivery, and that is what we want to see in the strip.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his diligence and his patient answers and for an excellent statement. I agreed with every word of it, and I appreciate the actions that the Government have taken to sanction two Ministers, both of whom have expressed genocidal intent. The Minister is also correct in saying that the two-state solution is in peril. It seems from today that there is an overwhelming majority in this place that support the immediate recognition of Palestine, and I sense from his answers that the Government are moving in that direction. What can he also do around the ICJ judgment that the west bank has been annexed, and what more can we do to ensure that others are punished for their crimes in the west bank?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and his important question. I am sure that, with the permission of the Speaker, I will be back in this House next week to discuss recognition and events at the conference in greater detail. On the question of the advisory opinion, which I know he knows is a far-reaching and complex advisory opinion, we will return to this House when we are in a position to give a full response to what is a complex and novel legal opinion.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his strong statement today and the sanctions he has outlined. I have listened carefully to his words, and he has spoken about the risk of empty slogans on the path to a two-state solution. I agree, but I fear we will be the last generation of diplomats and politicians for whom the option of recognising the state of Palestine is on the table. Will he reflect on that before next week's meeting?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend asks an important question. It is very much on the minds of all those in the Government who work on these issues that the viability of a two-state solution requires physical facts on the ground. It requires territory for two states, and clearly, illegal settlements proceeding at the rate I described in my statement is an impediment and a threat to that two-state solution.

Claire Hughes (Bangor Aberconwy) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and warmly welcome the actions that have been announced today. This Government said that they would take concrete actions, and they have. However, given the urgency of the situation facing millions of Gazans, with starvation just around the corner, and

given what we know about what the Israeli Government have done so far, may I respectfully ask the Minister to tell us what next?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend, both for her kind words and her commitment to these issues; I can reassure her constituents that she raises them with me regularly. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure I will return to the House next week to talk about the conference and the next steps. I hope that the situation improves: that we see aid reaching Gaza, that we see a ceasefire, and that we can start to talk about these issues in a more measured way in this House, reflecting that the situation is not as urgent as it is today. Until that time, I am sure I will be returning to the House with further updates, as I have been doing.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's announcement of the sanctions on these two racist and extremist Ministers, but they do not go far enough. They are not going to stop the expansion of settlements or the settler violence, because we know that that expansion is state-funded, state-sanctioned and state-supported. What we need now is recognition of a Palestinian state, and I hope that the Minister will come back to the Chamber next week to inform the House that that has happened. If that is the case, what is the next step once recognition is agreed?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend is committed to these issues, although I am sure she would not expect me to speculate at this point about what hypothetical next steps might be. I am sure I will be returning to this House, and I am sure I will continue to discuss these issues with her.

Mark Sowards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, having visited both Israel and Palestine just a few weeks ago. I welcome the Minister's statement today, as sanctioning these two extremist individuals is exactly the right thing to do; they are enemies of peace, and no two-state solution will ever be achieved while they are in post. It is also clear to me that Prime Minister Netanyahu has come to rely on these two Ministers for his political survival, and the feeling on the ground in Israel among ordinary Israelis—backed up by consistent polling—is that they do not support their Prime Minister and will change their Government at the first opportunity at the next election. Will the Minister set out how the UK Government can not only sanction those who seek to destroy peace, but support those who champion moderation and peacemaking in the region, both in Palestine and in Israel?

Mr Falconer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, both for his question and the travel he has recently undertaken. As I am sure he would expect, I will not be drawn on questions about Israel's democratic process—clearly, their elections are a matter for them—but I can assure my hon. Friend that we do everything that we can to try to support peacemakers on both sides of this conflict to find common cause.

Harpreet Uppal (Huddersfield) (Lab): I welcome these sanctions, and pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all his hard work; I thank him and officials for everything they are doing. As other colleagues have done, I also ask him

to ensure that we can recognise Palestine at the UN conference, which will be a big moment. The US is a key partner in this work, and my hon. Friend—the Minister, I should say—will know that the US ambassador to Israel has said that the goal of an independent Palestinian state is no longer something it is pursuing. What discussions are we having with the US on that?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend is kind, and I am grateful for her words. She is very welcome to call me her hon. Friend. The questions that she raises are key. We discuss these issues with our friends and our allies. Not all our positions are the same, but I will always set out with clarity, both from this Dispatch Box and in all my diplomatic engagements, the position of the UK Government.

Tracy Gilbert (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions outlined by my hon. Friend today, and I thank him for all the work he has done. I know his commitment to the Palestinian people and the concerns he has, which he shares with us on a regular basis. Action has been required for some time. The up and coming UN conference on a two-state solution is an opportunity to work with allies or alone to recognise the Palestinian state. May I add my voice to that request and ask my hon. Friend: if not then, when?

Mr Falconer: I once again thank my hon. Friend for her kind words and recognise her force of feeling on the question of recognition. As I said earlier, I am sure I will be back in this House and continuing to discuss these issues with her.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): I very much welcome the recognition in the statement today of what is going on in the west bank. I raised the issue of settler violence and the suppression of Palestinian rights several weeks ago in the House, following the disgraceful events we saw over Easter with the suppression of worship. I very much welcome the sanctions we have seen today. My hon. Friend talks about a two-state solution, but as other Members have said, we need two states for a two-state solution. What we are seeing from the Israeli Government is a clear attempt to stop there being a viable Palestinian state. What my constituents want and what the Palestinian people want is recognition. We need to do more, and next week is the perfect opportunity for us to recognise a Palestinian state. It is needed now.

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend points to his long record, with which I am familiar, of pressing these points. He is right to say that a two-state solution clearly requires two states. It is vital that nobody, not in Israel or anywhere else, forecloses that possibility.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): I welcome these sanctions, which need to be seen in the context of £129 million of extra aid, the refunding of UNRWA, sanctions on settlers, the suspension of the arms trade and, importantly, the suspension of trade negotiations. That is the context of the action by this Government. However, the suffering goes on and it is not accidental; it is deliberate. The achievement of these sanctions today is a result of this Government working with other Governments. We know that we achieve more together than we do alone. In that context, and with the summit next week, will the Minister take the message from across

this House and from all our constituencies and communities that Britain wants a recognition of the Palestinian state unequivocally, immediately and unconditionally? That is a message from Britain to the summit next week.

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend speaks with real force and authority, and I have heard her message clearly.

Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): This Israeli Government continue to perpetrate horrific and appalling violence against Palestinian people, and that is also against the interests of Israel and Israeli people. We know that Hamas are only interested in death and destruction. I welcome the action today as a sign of willingness to take action against anyone who might be a bar or a block to a two-state solution. The Minister has already heard from Members from all parts of the House and been urged to take specific steps, but will he confirm what options are open to him to support and strengthen the overwhelming majority of Israelis and Palestinians who want a peaceful future? What action can he take against anyone who is a bar to a two-state solution in the future?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend has rightly focused on the important questions that are at issue, such as how we can maintain the viability of a two-state solution. That is the only route to peaceful harmony, with two states side by side, and it is on that objective that our efforts are focused.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his leadership on this issue.

One of the most regular attenders at my surgeries is a Palestinian woman who has lost both friends and family in this conflict. Her cousin died recently. Each time she comes, it is harder for me to tell her that the Government are doing all that they can to protect the lives and rights of Palestinians. On Saturday she brought a gift, because it was the day after Eid, but she was also angry and tearful. I was ashamed, because I could not tell her that our Government were doing all that they could in this situation.

The Minister has said twice in his responses that delivering aid directly by sea and by air is inefficient, but surely efficiency is not the aim here; saving lives is. Surely inefficient aid is better than no aid. Will the Minister look at this again, with our international partners, to see what aid we can deliver to these people?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend speaks with the painful authority of one who has clearly taken a great deal of time to get to know someone who is facing truly dreadful circumstances in Gaza. I am grateful to all those, on my Benches and beyond, who take part in such engagement and share it with me. I recognise how heavily the responsibilities weigh on us, both constituency Members and, of course, those of us in the Government.

It is not simply inefficiency that makes me counsel the House repeatedly not to focus on air and sea routes. We do keep them under regular review, and we discuss them with our partners, particularly our friends and allies in Jordan, who have conducted important airlifts of aid into the Gaza strip. The reason I counsel the House in the way that I do is that I see so many of these cases, and I am so conscious of the aggregate demands.

[Mr Falconer]

If we can get aid safely into Gaza in a way that is consistent with humanitarian principles, of course we will do so. I can reassure my hon. Friend and his constituent that we keep that under regular review, but I must be honest with the House and say that it is road routes that will meet the scale and the manner that are required.

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his work on so many important issues in the region, and for finding the time to answer questions from Members in all parts of the House so thoroughly over the past two hours. I also welcome his important announcement about sanctions that draw an essential distinction between the far-right extremist Ministers and the people of Israel as a whole.

We desperately need a ceasefire, we need more aid to get into Gaza to alleviate the horrendous human suffering, and we need the hostages who are still being held to be released. What further steps will the Government take towards achieving all those objectives?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and for his commitment to issues throughout the region. He has been raising the concerns of his constituents with me since we were both first elected, and I am sure that he will continue to do so. I know that many people in Chipping Barnet are focused not just on the horrors that we have discussed in relation to aid provision and on the violence, but on the circumstances of the hostages, who remain very much in our minds. There is a British mother who is waiting for the safe return of her son. We will not cease our efforts to try to secure the release of those hostages.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I welcome the sanctions against Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, and the coalition that was built to exert maximum pressure. It is

very significant, as the Government's sanctions have been in other contexts around the world relating to human rights, corruption and other issues. Next week's conference will be critical to, in the Minister's words,

"defend the vision and viability of two sides living side by side in peace."

Surely it is time to recognise the state of Palestine and agree a credible timeline with allies to bring this about. Will the Minister confirm that that is the Government's objective?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend has extensive experience of international coalition building and of taking steps against those who support corruption or who, as in this case, breach human rights. I can confirm that we will work with our friends and allies to try to preserve a path to a two-state solution at the conference next week, in the way that he sets out.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I thank both the Minister and Members for their perseverance.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (Extension of Duration of Non-jury Trial Provisions) Order 2025, which was laid before this House on 6 May, be approved.—
(*Anna Turley.*)

Question agreed to.

Grenfell Tower Fire: Eighth Anniversary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Anna Turley.)

8.30 pm

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): On Saturday, we mark eight years since 72 people lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower fire—eight years of fighting for truth, eight years without justice, and eight years of too often glacial change. This will be the last anniversary before the tower starts to come down, and it will no longer stand as a painful symbol of injustice, greed and impunity on the west London skyline. As the tower starts to be deconstructed, it is even more important that we remember the 72 people who lost their lives, and I am sure that this House will continue to stand united with their families, the survivors and the community until justice is served and systemic change is implemented.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for making a powerful opening statement on the really important and tragic anniversary that is coming up. Of the 72 people who lost their lives, 18 were children. Some 37 residents were disabled, and 15 of them died. Does my hon. Friend agree that even though the tower will come down in a few years, the trauma, suffering, pain and anguish will live with the people of Grenfell for many years to come?

Joe Powell: I thank the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee for her intervention. I completely agree with her, and the legacy must be the systemic change that I talked about. Many of the people who lost their lives in Grenfell were disabled, so I welcome the Government's commitment to laying regulations that will mandate personal emergency evacuation plans for disabled people, which is a crucial step forward. I know that the Minister has recently taken fire safety into his brief and will look closely at the resources to make sure that such plans are implemented and available for disabled people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward this issue? It is appropriate and right that this House should recall the tragic events of 14 June 2017 and pay tribute to all of the 72 innocent lives that were lost—I think the House is united in thinking of those families. Although the fire happened in 2017, the memories linger long for the families who lost loved ones. The Crown Prosecution Service has indicated that decisions regarding potential charges are not expected until late 2026, which will be almost a decade from when it happened. Does the hon. Member agree that more effort must be made to expedite the process, to ensure that families and friends have justice and the closure that they need to grieve and move on with their lives?

Joe Powell: I thank the hon. Member for expressing his solidarity, and he is right. The finding of the public inquiry that reported in September was devastating: the simple truth is that the deaths that occurred were all avoidable. I know we must respect the criminal investigation and avoid saying anything that jeopardises that process, but on behalf of our community, I simply say to our Government that until there is criminal accountability for those responsible, there will be no justice.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I would like to send my condolences to the family, friends and loved ones of all those who lost their lives eight years ago. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that, if justice is to be delivered, the Government need to think very carefully about delivering on the Hillsborough law and the duty of candour?

Joe Powell: I absolutely agree. I applaud the Prime Minister's personal commitment to bring in the Hillsborough law. At the party conference in September last year, he said that the law is

"for the sub-postmasters in the Horizon scandal. The victims of infected blood. Windrush. Grenfell Tower. And all the countless injustices over the years, suffered by working people at the hands of those who were supposed to serve them."

Those are the Prime Minister's words. I agree that we should see that law introduced before we return to Liverpool later this year, and see it accompanied by a national oversight mechanism, so that victims can be independently reassured that inquiry recommendations deliver meaningful change. The sad truth is that we know that if the lessons from the Lakanal House fire in 2009 had been learned, as the coroner intended, it is very likely that the Grenfell tragedy could have been prevented. We cannot allow that to happen again.

For the community of North Kensington, Grenfell will always be in our hearts, and I welcome the hard work of the Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission to select a fitting permanent tribute to the memory of the 72, but our community needs continued support today. I thank the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for building safety, the Mayor of London and the many other elected officials for their regular visits to North Kensington and their engagement with the community. They will know that, as the tower is brought down, it is vital that community health services, including mental health services, are maintained, and I hope our local NHS leadership, working with the Government, can make sure that those services remain at least for the period of deconstruction. It is also essential that survivors have the monitoring they need to spot and address long-term health conditions that may arise.

For the residents around the tower, change has also been too long in coming. I regularly meet the residents of the Lancaster West estate, the Silchester estate and many others. On the Lancaster West estate, there is now the prospect of an £85 million gap in the budget to complete the major works that were promised by local and central Government after the fire. Clearly, no project of this scale should be overrunning so dramatically, but that promise to residents must be kept. I call on the Minister to do all he can, working with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, to find a solution.

The challenge goes much wider than Lancaster West. Since being elected, I have dealt with thousands of housing cases relating to poor-quality repairs, damp and mould, and a culture of disrespect, especially for social housing tenants.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Eight years on, we remember the deep sorrow, and stand with the survivors and families. Grenfell really did expose failures in building safety and massive social inequality. At the time, I was a teacher, and the deaths of those children

[Amanda Martin]

were tragic. Now I am an MP, I think it is upon us to do all we can in this place not only to bring those people social justice and the justice they deserve, but to make sure it does not happen again.

Joe Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I do applaud the many steps the Government are taking on this issue—for example, on professionalising the housing sector and implementing Awaab's law on damp and mould. As she states, the truth is that without real change, all of us in this House know that a tragic case such as that of Awaab Ishak could easily happen again. In my constituency, that means that the purpose of the RBKC, Notting Hill Genesis, Peabody, Octavia and others should be to serve the residents, not to make their lives a misery, as too often ends up happening. We have launched a local campaign on safe and healthy homes to try to address the systemic failure in the community around Grenfell.

There will be no justice until the painfully slow process of remediating unsafe buildings across the country is complete.

Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Last week, the residents of more than 40 flats in Barbourne Works, Worcester, were suddenly evicted after an inspection of unremediated cladding found such severe fire hazards that an immediate prohibition notice was issued. How that was able to happen is a question that must be answered. In the meantime, does the Minister agree that the building managers—in this case, FirstPort—must put residents first, and must not be allowed to let legal disputes or the allocation of blame slow down the urgent work of making the building safe and allowing residents to return home?

Joe Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I agree—it is staggering that hundreds of thousands of people are still living in buildings like the one he describes, with major fire defects. Members across the House from up and down the country will have constituents affected, with people trapped in unsellable properties, leaseholders on the hook for non-cladding defects, and social housing providers sinking funds into remediation that could be spent on building the new social homes our country desperately needs.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for securing this debate, and for realising from the first day he was elected that he is the Member for not only Kensington and Bayswater, but Grenfell. It is good that the Government are implementing all 58 recommendations of phase 2 of the inquiry, but does my hon. Friend agree that the four-year timetable is a long time to wait on top of the eight years that have already passed?

Joe Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for making that very valid point. It is good news that the Government have accepted all of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's recommendations, and I applaud them for taking the time to come back in detail rather than rushing a response. However, it is absolutely vital that timelines are met. The example of the slow pace of change on remediation is a warning to us all that this matter has to be gripped from the centre if we want to see systemic change.

In another example, shared ownership leaseholders in my constituency at Shaftesbury Place—a property managed by Notting Hill Genesis—saw their building insurance soar by more than 2,000% after a fire safety inspection. That is an increase of £5,000 a year in individual service charges. Those residents contest the report and the recommendations, and I hope that Notting Hill Genesis will work out a reasonable solution, but that is an example of what has to be fixed. The building insurance market may require Government intervention, as we did with flooding.

I know the Minister agrees that we must quicken the pace of remediation, and I urge him to consider what more the Government can do to underwrite the major works now, so that people do not have to wait. The best example of such action would be to widen access to the building safety fund to social housing providers so that they can put more capital into maintaining the condition of their current homes and into building new homes. I know the Government are also focused on giving the Building Safety Regulator the resources it needs so that we can rightly enforce higher standards post Grenfell, as well as accelerating house building and avoiding unnecessary delays.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I hope we will continue to debate this matter in the years to come, and that we can start to talk about the positives that have come out of it in terms of the recommendations and the lives that will be saved and changed. Eight years on, in Scotland—my hon. Friend might be surprised that that is what I am going to talk about—there are 5,500 properties affected by flammable cladding, with 25,000 people living in them. I sense my hon. Friend's frustration over the pace of remediation in England, and in particular in his own constituency; in Scotland, after eight years, just one building has been remediated. Hopefully in England, the pace is faster than that.

Joe Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for sharing those statistics. I think the reality is that the money is there; what we need to do is go building by building and solve the problems. That is where I welcome the Government's emphasis on devolving some of the decision making, for example, to a London remediation board, which might be something to look at for other parts of the country.

I am sure the House would appreciate an update on the Prime Minister's welcome commitment on 4 September that all the companies found by the inquiry to have been part of these horrific failings will stop being awarded Government contracts. As the inquiry said, the companies that made the cladding and insulation products—Arconic, Celotex and Kingspan—behaved with “systematic dishonesty” and

“engaged in deliberate and sustained strategies to manipulate the testing processes, misrepresent test data and mislead the market.”

Florence Eshalomi: One glaring matter to arise from the inquiry was this mention of the corporate greed of some of the developers. It is right, as my hon. Friend says, that the Government will be looking to ban those contracts. Survivors have also asked for prosecutions to come forward. Does he agree that, in addition to the Government banning those companies from receiving other contracts, there should be additional funding for the Met police so that they can swiftly bring to justice those who were responsible for this?

Joe Powell: I know that this is one of the biggest teams that the Met police have in operation, and of course it is right that they keep the funding in place until their work comes to fruition. I also agree with my hon. Friend that we must make sure that taxpayers' money is no longer going to those companies. I hope the Minister can give us some reassurance on that timeline, and that he can reassure us that, under the new system of construction product regulation, the same mistakes will not be made again.

Real change is hard. I have always believed, as Martin Luther King said, that while

"the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice."

For that, we need to act now in a way that will protect people in the future. As I mentioned earlier, the introduction of the Hillsborough law, the national oversight mechanism, and the Government's own reporting on inquiry recommendations and how they will be implemented, will all give people reassurance that this cannot happen again.

Grenfell was the most devastating residential fire since the world war two and the pain can never be erased, but I want to give the final word to one of the young people in our community who gives me hope. Noha Chentouf is 16 and is the new youth mayor for Kensington and Chelsea. I attended an event with her and other young leaders at Tate Britain last night. These were part of her words:

"They trimmed the budget, not the risk
then signed its safety with the flick of a wrist
but it was fine, they saved a few grand
who needs an alarm when profit was the main plan
we're supposed to give our trust to people who don't care about
our well being
no matter how many complaints they're gonna fail seeing
exactly what the residents were foreseeing
and they sit in a meeting full of complaints but they're disagreeing
ended in disaster with many fleeing
but 72 couldn't make being
alive
a life lost
is a light lost
but that doesn't mean the fight's lost."

8.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) for securing this opportunity to mark this weekend's eighth anniversary of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower and the loss of 72 innocent lives, including, as we have heard, 18 children. Time has not diminished the horror, the pain or the impact of that day—the lives of families and the community changed forever.

My hon. Friend has raised an awful lot of important points, and I hope to be able to cover them all. They are in keeping with his outstanding advocacy for his community. In the building safety space, there is no Member I speak to more than him; we will be together again tomorrow. I want to put it on the record that he pushes and presses me, quite rightly, in the interests of his community, day in, day out.

The most important tribute, though, is to the community, because for eight long years they have campaigned and fought for truth, justice and change. The Deputy Prime Minister and I are resolute in listening to them. We want to ensure that the bereaved, survivors, next of kin and resident voices are heard, including at the heart of Government. We will continue to work until the lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire have changed the system that led to that tragedy.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the Minister for his words and for attending the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee to give an update on behalf of the Government. The Committee heard from Grenfell United and survivors that for far too long social housing tenants were being ignored and dismissed. There is no recommendation or terms of reference in the inquiry on race or discrimination, but does he agree that the discrimination of disabled and black and minority ethnic residents was a contributing factor in the tenants being failed?

Alex Norris: It has always been clear to me, in my conversations with the bereaved and survivors and with families and next of kin, that the demographics in terms of race speak their own story, and that is similarly the case with disability. That is why it has informed our policy in PEEPs, which I will talk to shortly, as well as our entire agenda around residents' voice in social housing, which I will also come on to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi) and I discussed this when we were in the very early stages of our time as Members of Parliament, and I know exactly where I was sitting during the discussions we had then—I can see it but 10 metres from here. As I have said in every debate of this kind since I have been a Minister, if we had said to ourselves then that in eight years we would have achieved as little as we have, we would have thought that a significant failure. It is a significant failure, and I want those watching this debate to know that we understand that. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater said that the progress is glacial. That is exactly right, and it behoves us to change that with real intent. That is my commitment and the Deputy Prime Minister's commitment.

Last September, Sir Martin Moore-Bick published the inquiry's final report. It is a hugely important staging post and driver for action. The findings were clear: the system failed at every point—public, private, local, national. Families were failed. Residents' voices were ignored. Dishonest practices were propagated. The Prime Minister has apologised on behalf of the British state for its part in the failures that led to entirely avoidable deaths. I want to repeat the Prime Minister's words: it should never have happened.

We published our response to the inquiry in February. We accepted the findings and committed to delivering on all 58 recommendations and to going further through a broader approach to reform, including with regard to construction products. Last month we published our progress report on delivery, and we will continue to report on a quarterly basis. The next progress report in September will be a very big one, because we will also publish our full implementation plan, setting out how we will deliver the recommendations. I agree with my

[Alex Norris]

hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater that the legacy must be system change.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) says about it being a long time, and I know from speaking to the bereaved and survivors that they are frustrated that some of the recommendations will take time. The commitment I will make from this Dispatch Box is that nothing will take a day longer than it has to take. We are working with urgency and intent, and we will be very transparent as we do.

Florence Eshalomi: I appreciate that the Minister is working around the clock on this issue. I know that it is very important to him and that there are big challenges in his portfolio. Does he agree that because there are so many competing demands on the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, including looking at building safety and the Minister's new responsibility on fire safety, a clear way to ensure that the Government continue to keep focus on this issue is through a national oversight mechanism? It will help the Government ensure that there are clear deadlines and timeframes for the recommendations, which the Government have rightly accepted.

Alex Norris: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention; she pre-empts my next point. Before I move on, I want to recognise the point from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur), who said that he hopes that we will have opportunities to debate our progress. We have committed to an annual debate in this place about our progress, and we will have those debates until we have delivered on the recommendations.

Turning to oversight, we are committed to transparency, accountability and scrutiny. It is entirely right that the community, having been failed in the ways that they have, want to see very clear accountability. We will record all recommendations made by public inquiries on gov.uk by next summer, backdating it to 2024, so there will be public tracking of inquiry recommendations. That meets the commitment under the Grenfell Tower inquiry review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green knows that I will refer to the points I made at her Select Committee. The Cabinet Office, as part of its ongoing inquiry work, is exploring how to improve scrutiny and accountability for all inquiry responses, so that actions can be taken more quickly. I would not want to run ahead of that. To address the point from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson), we remain fully committed to a Hillsborough law, which will include a legal duty of candour for public servants and criminal sanctions for those who refuse to comply.

I turn now to justice, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater spoke with real power about. When I talk to the bereaved and survivors about whatever the matter of the day is, they always say to me, "Yes, Alex, but that is not justice yet." I know that, and the Prime Minister acknowledged last year that the inquiry final report, while exposing the truth, does not yet bring the justice that families rightly deserve.

Again, I am aware of the frustration in this area and the strong feeling that accountability has yet to be achieved. We continue to support the independent Metropolitan Police Service as it conducts its investigations—we know how important that is.

I want to touch on the tower itself. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater said, this will be a poignant anniversary because it will be the final one with the tower as it is. We will continue to work closely with bereaved families, survivors, next of kin and residents as we prepare work to carefully take down Grenfell Tower, starting in the autumn. They will remain at the heart of this work. As we look to the future, we are committed to supporting the independent memorial commission in its important work to create a fitting and lasting memorial determined by the community.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I will continue—as we have throughout—to meet with anyone who wants that, to listen and act on the issues we are raising and, more importantly, the issues they raise with us. I know that there is a lot of anxiety that as the tower is carefully taken down, the moment for the Grenfell community will be forgotten. Again, I want to give an assurance on that. I know that, with these colleagues behind me, that will never be the case, but for the Government it will not be either.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green said, this is a moment of trauma for individuals, so it is crucial that really good mental health support is available for the community. I and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton), are raising that with the integrated care board to ensure that the right mental health services are there, the right screening facilities are there, and there is the right screening for children and young people, which is such a community priority. I will work with my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater in that venture to ensure that those healthcare services are there.

It is clear and accepted that the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea also failed. The leadership has committed to change and has taken important steps forward, but we still hear from too many residents that they are not getting the experience they should. The Deputy Prime Minister and I have met the leader of the council, and we have challenged the council to become an exemplar as a fitting legacy for this tragedy. We will continue to hold the council to account until residents feel and see the change.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Lancaster West estate. I am conscious that even before that terrible night in 2017, residents there had lived on a building site for a very long time. They say that to me every time I see them. The council has a huge gap in funding—he said it is £85 million and I would say £84 million, but it is a significant gap either way. I will continue to work with him, the residents' association—I know that its able chair, Mushtaq Lasharie, will press us at every opportunity, as he rightly always does—and the council on how to take the issue forward.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned PEEPs, which has recently become a responsibility of mine and of MHCLG. As he said, we are looking to lay secondary legislation as soon as we can. I am committed to working with disability groups to ensure that the guidance and the

toolkit in its implementation is as good as possible. We have committed funding this year, and any future funding will be part of the spending review process, which is coming to its peroration tomorrow.

I agree with my hon. Friend's points on the pace of remediation. I inherited a trajectory that took us into the 2040s. Our remediation acceleration plan—certainly for buildings above 18 metres with unsafe cladding in a Government scheme—concertinas that to 2029. We will be updating our remediation acceleration plan this summer to push even further on what we can do to get quicker remediation.

My hon. Friend mentioned the challenges around social housing and the impact that has not just on remediation but on building. Those points were very well made. We will announce our longer-term plans in that space shortly.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the Minister for being generous in giving way. One of the issues constantly raised by registered social landlords is that they cannot apply for the building safety remediation. Will we see an update on that in the coming weeks, and perhaps in announcements tomorrow?

Alex Norris: On a point of fact, RSLs can access the building safety fund and cladding safety scheme, but I have heard from them that the circumstances in which they can do that—basically, declaring a degree of financial distress—are difficult for them, and I understand that.

I cannot be drawn on any events upcoming; all I will say is that my hon. Friend's suggestion has an awful lot of merit.

Kim Johnson: Will the Minister give way on that point.

Alex Norris: I will, but quickly, because I am down to seconds.

Kim Johnson: I want to recognise that so many leaseholders in my Liverpool Riverside constituency have been affected by the delay in remediation. Their lives are on hold because they cannot sell their flats and they cannot move forward. We need to look at what we can do to try to support those leaseholders.

Alex Norris: I totally agree. Those trapped are living in intolerable circumstances. As part of the update to the remediation acceleration plan, we will have more about what we can do to provide them with relief.

In conclusion, this has been a hugely important debate. We will have many more, and we will work our hardest to deliver justice for the community as quickly as we possibly can.

Question put and agreed to.

9 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 10 June 2025

[WERA HOBHOUSE *in the Chair*]

USAID Funding Pause

9.30 am

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the USAID funding pause and its impact on UK international development.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse. I thank everyone who has come this morning either to participate or to observe. Although a decision about an American Government Department's funding may seem distant in geography, it is dangerously close in consequence. The recent cuts to the United States Agency for International Development—USAID—by President Trump on his first day in office pose a grave risk to millions of people around the world, as well as to global stability. I believe they are either a mistake and a blunder, or a cruel and cynical ploy for popularity that will result in harm and suffering for the poorest on the planet.

The implications for our aid programme are threefold. First, the UK has effectively lost a key partner in aid, and one with which we have done great work in the past. Secondly, the sheer scale of the USAID cuts means that the gaps in funding cannot be filled by other donors, especially as almost all Governments, including our own, are now following the US example and reducing their aid spend to put more into their militaries. Thirdly, it could be argued that we, and indeed the world, should have seen this coming; we had become too reliant on the USA.

Having said that, I find it indefensible for the UK to follow suit and cut aid in an attempt to raise funds for increasing defence spend.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): My hon. Friend is making some compelling points. Does he agree that the crucial point is that if Britain retreats from our role as a leader in international development, we not only undermine our unique soft power but leave vital regions exposed, ceding ground to the increasing assertiveness of hostile powers and geopolitical rivals?

Brian Mathew: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I will cover many of those points. I find the cut totally indefensible and counterproductive. Apart from the soft power that our aid programme offers, it is a betrayal of principles we hold dear: reducing poverty and assuring global security.

On a personal note, aid cuts hit close to home for me. For much of my career I have worked in international aid, primarily in water, sanitation and hygiene, working to give people across Africa and the developing world access to clean drinking water, safe sanitation and good hygiene. Those simple things are vital to health, survival and prosperity.

According to WaterAid, the UK's annual budget for WASH has already been cut by approximately 82%, from a high of £206 million per year down to a critical low of just £37 million a year in 2022. Further cuts are likely to this most vital of sectors. Such cuts will hardly dissuade potential refugees from coming to our shores; they may even drive those refugees towards us if life becomes increasingly intolerable as a result of climate change, war and famine.

One impact of USAID cuts is growing hunger. Globally, almost 50% of all deaths among children under five are attributed to malnutrition. The USAID-funded famine early warning system—FEWS NET—the gold standard for monitoring and predicting food insecurity, went offline in January because of Trump's cuts, leaving organisations without a key source of guidance on where and when to deploy humanitarian aid. At the same time, other USAID cuts have led to feeding programmes themselves coming to an abrupt end. For example, therapeutic feeding centres in Nigeria have been closed, as have community-run kitchens in Sudan, at a time when famine threatens millions in that country. Meanwhile, thousands in Haiti have lost access to nutritional support. We are told that USAID emergency food rations are now rotting in warehouses.

The supply of HIV treatments and medication has been severely disrupted. The UNAIDS executive director has warned that if funding is not replaced, an additional 6.3 million AIDS-related deaths are expected over the next four years. We were likewise warned by a senior World Health Organisation staff member during the recent International Development Committee visit to Geneva that, with AIDS again running rampant, it is likely that drug-resistant variants of tuberculosis will now multiply and become a risk to us all, even in the developed north.

When healthcare systems are hit, sexual and reproductive health is often one of the first casualties.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. I have been in contact with the International Rescue Committee, my former employer, about the impact that the USAID cuts will have on it. It is estimated that the cuts to that agency alone will mean that 280,000 people in Yemen will lose access to primary care, mental healthcare and reproductive healthcare, and 3,000 people in Lebanon will be left without education. That is devastating not just in terms of the humanitarian impact; we need to think about it in terms of our own stability and security. It means diseases left unchecked, which cross borders and become pandemics, and it means young people left without education and opportunity and at risk of further marginalisation and radicalisation. Does he agree with that analysis?

Brian Mathew: I thank the hon. Member for her comments, and I will continue with more figures that emphasise those points.

During the 90-day freeze, an estimated 11.7 million women and girls have been denied modern contraceptive care. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that that will lead to 4.2 million unintended pregnancies and 8,340 women and girls dying from pregnancy and childbirth complications.

Alice Macdonald (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman about the impact that the cuts will have on women and girls. Does he agree that, as well as continuing to support women and girls through aid from this country, we must stand up for women's and girls' rights internationally? We have seen them rolled back in the past. That is why it is so important that we continue to do what we can to stand up for women, for example in Afghanistan, where their rights are being eroded every single day.

Brian Mathew: I completely agree with the hon. Member. An ActionAid project in Zambia safeguarding women from sexual exploitation was forced to close almost overnight.

Oxfam says that, thanks to the cuts to USAID, 95 million people could lose access to basic healthcare, potentially leading to 3 million preventable deaths a year, and 23 million children could lose access to education. When services collapse and diseases can spread unchecked, people lose hope, and they do not stay put. Migration pressures rise, conflicts hit new boiling points and markets react. As covid taught us all too well, deadly viruses such as Marburg and Ebola could leap from remote villages to our high streets in a matter of weeks, especially when the staff to deal with them have been given stop orders and removed from frontline duty.

We are already seeing other powers whose interests do not align with ours begin to fill the gaps left by USAID. China and Russia are expanding their influence in regions where western credibility is weakening. Just last week, some of us on the IDC heard from an official in the Burma/Myanmar freedom movement that USAID's withdrawal has happened at the same time as China has made quick inroads to prop up the military and curry influence in its efforts to get hold of rare earth minerals from that troubled country.

The United Kingdom has long prided itself on being a force for good in the world. Our work and leadership with British aid has not only saved lives but championed the best of our British values: fairness, the rule of law, health, education and opportunity across the globe. That is soft power in its most tangible form, and it is worth its weight in gold—and, more importantly, in lives and livelihoods. Sadly, we have made our own aid cuts recently, from the 0.7% GNI commitment down to 0.5% and then 0.3%. The reality is that with so much being spent on hotels for asylum seekers, instead of allowing them to work and pay their way while their status is determined, as little as 1% of UK GNI is now being spent on genuine aid.

We know what to do. We know that investing in WASH makes sense. We know that investing in girls' education reduces child marriage, improves economic outcomes and reduces inequality. We know that investing in pandemic preparedness, vaccine infrastructure and vaccine research protects not just vulnerable people around the world, but our NHS and public health here at home. International development is therefore smart policy. It reduces the risks that we would otherwise spend billions more to contain. What should we do? We must reaffirm our commitment to restoring the 0.7% target and publicly commit not to just the rhetoric of aid, but to actually doing it—and doing it well.

The withdrawal of USAID has created a moment of reckoning; the world is watching and the vulnerable are waiting. I will end by paraphrasing President John F. Kennedy

in his special message to Congress on foreign aid on 22 March 1961. We are aware of our obligations to the sick, the poor and the hungry, wherever they may live. It will both befit and benefit us to take this step boldly, on which will depend substantially the kind of world in which we and our children shall live. It is time for us to stand up and be counted.

Wera Hobhouse (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called. I will call the Front Benchers at 10.28 am. It looks like all Members will get to speak if they stick to six or seven minutes.

9.42 am

Alice Macdonald (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Hobhouse. I thank the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for securing this debate, which is a timely one, given that we are approaching 20 years since the Gleneagles summit held in Scotland in 2005. Twenty years ago, Nelson Mandela spoke in Trafalgar Square calling on us to make poverty history. World leaders gathered in Gleneagles in 2005, and they rose to the challenge, cancelling debt for some of the world's poorest countries and boosting aid.

In 2025, aid and development are firmly in the spotlight, but for very different reasons and in a very different context. While this debate is focused on the impact of USAID funding cuts, there is no doubt that those cuts will have a seismic impact on the landscape globally, and on our own approach to development. The US is the world's largest aid donor, providing around 20% of all aid from the 32 members of the OECD. In February, we announced the very difficult decision that UK aid would be cut to boost defence spending.

While I welcome the uplift in defence spending, for people such as me and the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes who have worked in development for many years, it was a painful decision. However, it is important to emphasise the difference between the decisions made in the United States and those made in the UK. While I will not comment too much on the rationales for different Governments' decisions, the UK Government have been clear that this was not an ideological decision but one driven by financial pressures. I believe, and I am sure that the Minister will assure us, that there is a commitment to continuing to develop aid.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): On the question of whether the Government's decision was driven by financial motivations, does the hon. Member agree that whether it is 0.7% or 0.3%, the key is that UK GDP must rise, as her own Chancellor has said? If our economy shrinks, the 0.7% figure becomes almost irrelevant because it is 0.7% of a much smaller budget. All that matters overseas is the amount of cash they get, not the percentage of our domestic product, so we must drive the economy first before we try to deliver the mechanism that I am sure most of us are in favour of.

Alice Macdonald: The hon. Member is right; this is an internationally agreed percentage of gross national income, but too many countries have not met that target. As has been mentioned, some countries are stepping back, so it is important to be clear that we will keep our commitment to getting back to 0.7% as soon

as the fiscal circumstances allow. However, in this new reality, we must ensure that our aid delivers maximum impact where it is spent, that we take actions to mitigate the effect of these cuts and that we keep the commitment to return to 0.7% in the long term.

In that spirit, I will focus on five key areas where the Government should act. First, they must cut in-donor refugee costs. As many Members know, we spend a significant portion of our current aid budget in the UK on those costs, which were approximately £4 billion in 2023. That trend started under the previous Conservative Government—who also left us with huge backlogs in the asylum system—and I know that this Government are determined to tackle it. We have seen some progress in bringing down those costs, and provisional estimates suggest that they were £2.8 billion in 2024, but we need to continue that trajectory with a clear timeline and a commitment across Departments to get them down.

Secondly, we must maximise the impact of our aid. It is important that we align with the “leave no one behind” principle in the 2015 sustainable development goals. I would not want to be in the shoes of the Minister for International Development in the other place, because there are difficult decisions to be made, as members of the International Development Committee recently heard. It is important that Members of Parliament, including Back Benchers, clearly see the criteria and the vision against which those decisions are being made.

The “leave no one behind” principle must, as I alluded to earlier, include a focus on women and girls. It is clear that the USAID cuts will have a big impact in that area. In 2023, the US was the largest single donor in areas including population, reproductive health and family planning. Under the Conservative Government’s last round of cuts to the aid budget, we saw that women and girls were disproportionately affected, so it is important that does not happen again. I recently asked the Minister for Europe in the main Chamber whether women and girls would remain “at the heart” of our policy, and he assured me that they would.

At the International Development Committee, the Minister for International Development in the other place assured us that although there would be less money for women and girls in education, it would be mainstreamed across all the priorities. Can the Minister elaborate on how we will ensure that they are prioritised and, importantly, how we will continue to support women’s rights organisations? As UN Women has shown recently, there has been a detrimental impact, with many such organisations at risk of having to close their doors altogether. When we invest in women and girls, we get better outcomes, not only for those countries but for ourselves.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): The UN has warned us that more than half of frontline, women-led organisations could shut down within six months due to global aid cuts. That is not just a funding crisis; it is a humanitarian catastrophe. Does the hon. Member agree that restoring funding to those groups must be a priority if we are to prevent the complete collapse of women’s services in conflict zones?

Alice Macdonald: I fully agree. We have had programmes, such as the Equality Fund, where we have been clear on the importance of women’s rights-led organisations.

I have met many women’s rights defenders of all ages who are doing amazing work. We must continue to back them and listen to them, because they know what is best in the context in which they work.

I am sure other Members will speak to the importance of investing in multilateral efforts, such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Global Fund, which I also want to back. Those funds have a proven return on investment for the UK taxpayer. The World Bank’s International Development Association fund and the African Development Fund also have important roles to play in alleviating poverty, and we have been big backers of those in the past.

As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the United Nations, I would also like to underline the value of the United Nations. There is, of course, space for reform, and I am sure we are all aware of some of the flaws in the system, but it is a unique vehicle for coming together as a world to tackle some of the biggest challenges we face and to increase the value of our aid.

We must also look beyond aid to leverage other forms of financing, many of which we could leverage without cost to the taxpayer. As the Independent Commission for Aid Impact pointed out, foreign direct investment, remittances and other forms dwarf the overall aid budget, so I hope the UK will continue to lead on innovative financing. That includes how we can recycle International Monetary Fund special drawing rights. In 2020, we received an allocation of £19 billion from the IMF as part of the response to covid. We could re-channel that to provide zero-interest finance to low-income countries or through multilateral development banks. We could also put idle foreign reserves into action. A small portion of the UK’s largely idle exchange equalisation account could be used to support low-income countries.

The last Labour Government led on debt relief. I was proud of what we did at Gleneagles to lead those efforts. We must do so again, given that debt payments for low-income countries are at their highest for 30 years, with 32 African countries spending more on servicing their external debt than on healthcare. Given that 90% of low-income countries’ debt is governed by English law, the UK could do a lot to bring private creditors to the table to get the best possible deals. I hope the Minister can set out what we are doing in that regard, especially as we approach the conference on financing for development in Seville in just a few weeks’ time.

Finally, more broadly, we need a reset on aid and development. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary has been clear that we want to move to an approach founded on partnership, not paternalism, which puts the countries that have traditionally been recipients of aid in the driving seat. We have seen cases in the past. Indonesia, for example, used to be a recipient of Gavi funding but is now giving money itself. We need to look at success stories and say why they matter not only for tackling poverty but for increasing prosperity and tackling inequality, including in our own country. I see our development work as insurance; it is a downpayment for the long term to tackle some of the upstream drivers of migration.

I hope that we will continue to lead internationally, as we are domestically, on using science, innovation and technology to its best effect. Innovators, such as the John Innes Centre in the constituency next to mine, are

[Alice Macdonald]

doing amazing work to tackle hunger and climate change, and we must back those efforts to look at how we can support developing countries abroad.

We all know that tough decisions are having to be made in the extraordinary times in which we live, but I know that this Government are internationalists. I believe that our party will continue to lead and use all the levers at our disposal to tackle poverty and inequality wherever they are found.

Wera Hobhouse (in the Chair): I remind Members to stick to the time limit as much as they can.

9.52 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse.

I thank the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for leading the debate. He and I have talked often about his previous job before he came here. I put on the record my thanks to him for what he did. His heart is in this debate, as was clear in his comments. This is a huge issue: since Trump signed the initial executive order in January, there has been a moral obligation on countries like ours to do our best to pick up what may be lost in terms of humanitarian safety, so it is great to be here to discuss that impact.

The United States is the world's largest aid donor, providing 20% of all aid. In addition, in 2023 it was the largest single donor in areas including population, reproductive health and humanitarian aid. In March 2025, the Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, stated that 82% of all USAID programmes would be ended. I will try to be respectful, but I have to say that if the richest country in the world cuts back on aid to that extent, it reflects badly on that country; I think there is something wrong there.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) and I are Christians, and we tithe our money so 10% of our income goes to charities and Christian work. We are not better than anybody else—I make that quite clear—but we do that because we feel we are morally supposed to. The reflection on the USAID programme is absolutely unbelievable and incomprehensible for a country with so much money.

I was telling my hon. Friend about a conversation between two American ladies—I do not know who they were—that I overheard in my hotel in Waterloo this morning. I heard one say to the other, “Oh, by the way, I had to get my leg done and it cost \$100,000.” I nearly spilt my coffee on the floor—\$100,000 and there was not another word about it. The US as a country has an obligation to others across the world, and it needs to play its part. I say that with respect and in all honesty.

The decisions that began in January have ultimately raised concerns about the continuity of global health and developmental support work. As my party's health spokesman, my interest is piqued by the potential for humanitarian and health aid to be ultimately affected as a result. I understand that the Government have made some exceptions with waivers, but hundreds of thousands of people will undoubtedly be impacted because of those decisions.

According to *The Independent*, 912,730 women per week are being denied contraception. HIV vaccine trials in South Africa have been halted. Food and shelter programmes in refugee camps have been reduced or stopped early. US withdrawal has led to an increase in influence from outside actors such as China—let us beware China using its money to fill the space and therefore get what it wants. Up to half a million children could be at risk of outbreaks of malaria and cholera, which can be prevented in normal circumstances with aid.

Not only are such decisions impacting people across the globe, but closer to home the staff are ultimately out of employment as well. There is a disregard for the number of jobs that it could impact. The Minister has compassion and interest in this issue, and I do not think any of us will be disappointed in her response to our requests. In any discussions that she and the Government have with the US on this matter, the UK must work with other countries to meet development goals and ensure that those struggling across the globe are not left with nothing.

The UK has a stellar reputation for supporting countries facing poverty. In Northern Ireland we have several charities, non-governmental organisations and churches—I work with them all the time in my constituency of Strangford and in Newtownards—that are pivotal in supporting people in poverty. Charities such as Challenge Ministries, Mission Africa, Self Help Africa and Children in Crossfire come out of the churches and what they do. Their continued efforts reflect our commitment to supporting the nations who need help, and we must ensure that to some extent we continue to do that in the long term.

Mr Campbell: On the NGOs and the other groups helping people at home, the House of Commons Library summary indicates that over a quarter of UK aid has been spent on refugees based in the UK. Does my hon. Friend agree that that would be better deployed overseas to try to assist the economies of developing countries, because of the concern about massive immigration into the UK? If those economies were helped and assisted, it would do more to reduce the numbers of people coming to the UK and offset the problems that we occasionally see on our streets.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His comments about what we should do are incredibly wise, because there would be benefits. Sometimes the full appreciation of that is not known.

I was at a Samaritan's Purse charity event last Friday in my constituency, where I was quite critical of USAID. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, whose missionary work I am aware of, is also working with Samaritan's Purse. Such people in my constituency and elsewhere fill the gap where the aid falls down. We owe a great debt to those NGOs, church groups, missionary organisations and the likes of Samaritan's Purse for what they do and how they respond to emergencies, whether they are floods, earthquakes, war or whatever.

To conclude, both Governments have said in the past that more needs to be done to help low-income countries raise their own funds for development and to address climate change, especially in relation to poverty reduction. We should be proud as a nation of what we

have done, while also encouraging our counterparts in the US to ensure that we do what we can to support as a collective.

I agree that every pound or dollar spent must not be wasted on political gesturing and must be spent well, but we must not stop spending altogether. That is my fear about USAID, because we have a moral obligation. I know that our US counterparts can work with us to find worthwhile projects, cut the political posturing and make a global difference, which is what we all need to do.

9.59 am

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): Good morning, Mrs Hobhouse; it is a privilege to have you in the Chair. I thank the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for bringing this important debate to Westminster Hall today.

Internationalism is at the heart of the Labour movement. When it comes to solidarity with the oppressed and victims of injustice, truly there are no borders. I want to touch on some recurring themes. The first is the ongoing dominance of Washington DC in our foreign policy. There is no doubt that the US continues to heavily influence our international approach. The American President challenged European nations to increase their defence spending at the same time as he cut USAID. The British people we serve deserve better than our nation's meek obedience to Washington DC. Human rights, upholding and following international law, and using what global influence we have for peace and security should be at the forefront of our thinking and action.

The ripple effect of outside influence impacts our domestic policy as well as our foreign policy. A politician talking about "tough choices" almost always means that the poorest, the disadvantaged and the most vulnerable are at the wrong end of whatever the decisions are, whether at home or abroad. Domestically, the proposed cuts to welfare mean that disabled people are facing a life of forever poverty. With reductions in benefits and cost of living increases, on top of the added financial pressures involved in being disabled, it is accurate to say that, for many, the cuts would be lethal.

A deadly fate also awaits people in some of the most dangerous, volatile and destitute countries that rely on our overseas aid just to survive. Human rights and humanitarian law are essential for global security, and those essentials are under serious threat.

Helen Maguire: On global security, the Mines Advisory Group, a leading mine NGO, has been forced to shut down its operations in Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso and Mauritania and scale back in Iraq, Senegal, South Sudan and Sri Lanka because of USAID cuts. This is not the moment to retreat. Does the hon. Member agree that the UK must ensure sustained funding for humanitarian mine action to keep civilians safe and support post-conflict recovery?

Brian Leishman: Yes, the hon. Member has my absolute agreement.

In all honesty, the UK is contributing to the growing danger that I described. We continue to sell arms to human rights-abusing states and further compound that awful act by cutting overseas development aid, which prevents conflict, builds peace, increases global

security and saves and transforms lives. I utterly reject the narrative that for defence spending to be increased, overseas development aid has to be cut. Pushing that type of politics is an example of dividing people, sowing discord and creating disharmony and suspicion—creating a society that is dog eat dog and to hell with your neighbour.

Cutting overseas aid is not only immoral but a completely false economy, because our security at home is made stronger when the security of others is guaranteed abroad. For example, on International Women's Day earlier this year, Liberation organised for women from Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Gaza and Western Sahara to come to Westminster. Those women shared personal stories of hunger, illness, sexual exploitation and intimidation, and persecution. Our overseas aid helps to provide safety from those awful circumstances. I think we all agree that all politics is personal—with nothing more so than the stories those women shared with parliamentarians that evening.

Before finishing, I want to touch again on what I said about internationalism. The fight against inequality must be tackled here and across the world. Austerity and cuts, whether at home or abroad, should be rejected. Our Foreign Office must have a coherent, joined-up approach. It is our country's duty to respond to the world's crises, make humanitarian aid available, and promote peace and global security. My only ask of the Minister is that she take that message back to the Secretary of State.

10.4 am

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Hobhouse. I declare my interest as co-chair of both the APPG on nutrition for development and the APPG on HIV, AIDS and sexual health.

This is a period of great uncertainty, not just because of what has happened in the US, but because of what is happening in the UK. Perhaps this debate is a couple of days early, because when the new Minister for International Development, Baroness Chapman of Darlington, appeared before the International Development Committee, everything was predicated on the spending review. Indeed, the Committee had to send back the Government's response to our inquiry on hunger and sustainable development goal 2 because there was no substance in the reply, since everything was predicated on the outcome of the spending review.

I hope that tomorrow we will get certainty. I do not expect the Minister to be able to advance anything specific today, but it is important that we have that certainty, because uncertainty is one of the worst features affecting our ability to plan and to combat the issues that we face globally. Obviously, the US has contributed enormously to that uncertainty. It is still not clear what is happening in the US, and that is why I welcome the fact that the International Development Committee will soon visit Washington and New York. It will be a fact-finding visit, so that we can ascertain exactly what the approach is, and whether Mr Musk's departure means anything for how these matters will be dealt with.

I do not want to dwell too much on regret about the American situation. I think that we have to move on, as others have said, to a new debate about the future

[David Mundell]

model of development. The Government, through the Minister for International Development, have indicated that that is their view, but again, there have not been many clues as to exactly what that might mean. We have heard about a realignment of existing multilateral organisations; it is not clear to me what that means. What I am clear on is that the UK should continue to contribute significantly to Gavi, the Global Fund and Unitaid, because those are multilateral organisations that deliver on their own specific objectives but also provide a backbone for health services in many poorer countries. Without those interventions, there would not be a health service being offered at all, so it is vital that we continue.

Cutting mid-way through programmes is always chaotic. One of the most shocking things that I heard in recent evidence to the International Development Committee was about a US cut during the overwhelming of Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We heard that the radio system, which was operated by volunteers, had to be switched off during that attack. That meant that people could not hear where the attack was coming from and where to go to be safe. I think that everybody who heard that evidence, from the guy who had to do that, understood how hard it was—and it was the direct consequence of a cut.

I want to focus on nutrition and give some key facts. A billion women and girls suffer from malnutrition, which impacts their health, productivity and economic futures. Malnutrition is a leading killer, responsible for one in five maternal deaths and nearly half of child deaths under the age of five. Malnutrition costs the global economy more than \$1.6 trillion annually in lost productivity and potential. US aid cuts could lead to 1 million children with severe and acute malnutrition losing access to treatment annually. But it can be—and it has been—different. We know that for every \$1 invested, \$23 is returned to the local economy. Investing in nutrition is not charity, and it is not even the moral thing to do; it is a strategic decision and investment, and the UK, US and other funders should continue to do it.

The UK Government are being asked to invest £50 million in the child nutrition fund. The UK has historically been a leader in the funding of child nutrition interventions. In both 2022 and 2023, the UK committed £6 million to the fund, which has high-impact, cost-effective malnutrition solutions. With the funding crisis caused by US cuts, the ask is now £50 million.

I hope that on the IDC's visit to the US, we will find out more about what is happening with HIV/AIDS, because there are competing suggestions about whether the US will return to funding. The hon. Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald) alluded to women and girls; one of the most important messages we have to get across is that in sub-Saharan Africa, it is women and girls who are most affected by HIV, and it is important to continue funding there.

I also agree with the hon. Member about the importance of science and innovation as we move forward in this new development world. I had the opportunity to visit the John Innes Centre outside Norwich, as well as Rothamsted Research in Harpenden, where a huge amount of research is going ahead. The research and

scientific leadership that the UK can offer might be the replacement for the financial leadership we offered in the past.

10.11 am

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Hobhouse. I thank the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for securing the debate. The International Development Committee is due in a couple of weeks—if our visas are approved—to go to the US and have some of these discussions. It will be interesting to see what is said. I do not know whether I need to declare this as an interest, but I am the Labour party representative on the Progressive Alliance; our sister party is the Democratic party, and I campaigned for it in the 2012 election. I think it is obvious that my view is that we should not have the current US Administration, and their decision to slash the US aid budget was profound and devastating.

Turning to the UK context, as someone who has spent their entire career in the charity sector, I was heartbroken by the decision to cut aid to 0.3%, but it is important for the record to lay out some of the context for that decision. We inherited a horrific economy, the majority of the aid budget—a huge amount of that money—was going on asylum spend in hotels, and we faced a world in which Ukraine had been invaded by Putin and his forces. While I regret the decision to cut aid, it was taken in that terrible context, and because of the vital need to increase defence spending to 2.5%.

Why was the economy in such a state? It was because of the devastating Truss mini-Budget. Aid had already been reduced to 0.5% because of the decision that Sunak had taken, and Boris Johnson had abolished a world-leading Government Department. In addition, why did Russia invade? It was because—I should say that I do not mean this as a criticism of the last Government—the west collectively failed to stand up to Putin. We allowed him and Assad to do what they wanted in Syria; we took no action when Assad unleashed chemical weapons on his own people. Putin invaded Crimea with near impunity in 2014, and of course we had attacks on UK soil, including the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Taylor: I will not, because I want to make a point; I find the moralising tone of my hon. Friend the Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman) a bit much. The reason the last Government were able to do what they did—slashing the aid budget, abolishing the Department for International Development and wrecking the economy—was that we have never had a weaker Opposition than we did when the hard left was sadly in charge of my party. Putin was emboldened, in part, by the hard left's constant appeasement and apologism for the things he was doing, their downplaying of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and their suggestion that we send the sample from Salisbury back to Putin to test whether or not he was responsible.

Brian Leishman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

David Taylor: No, I will not, because I find the moralising tone completely infuriating. Having put that on record, I turn to the matter at hand: the horrible situation that we are in. I note with respect that other hon. Members have mentioned causes that they deeply care about, and I care about those causes—

Mike Martin: On geopolitics, will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Taylor: I will.

Mike Martin: If we put aside the internecine warfare of the Labour party, the hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point about a retreat from the world. Retreating from the world as the west, the UK or the US, opens the door to creating more problems, and then we retreat further. Would he argue that that is what we are doing—vacating the field to our opponents?

David Taylor: I do not believe that is the case, because I believe the Minister is going to set out the ways in which we are still taking our place on the world stage, but I hear the hon. Member's concern.

Hon. Members in this Chamber have passionately advocated for causes that they care deeply about. I respect that, especially the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes and his passionate plea for WASH. I could talk about a number of causes important to me, but what is most important is that we increase the size of the pie. For that reason, I have been working constructively with other Members of the House to put suggestions to the Government for how, given the decision to cut aid to 0.3%, we could look at other forms of development finance.

In the interests of time, I will not go over the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald) made about asylum seekers, remittances, special drawing rights, the exchange equalisation account and debt relief, but I will add to that list the need to release the Chelsea money as soon as possible. The Government announced recently that they are looking to take further action against Roman Abramovich. If that money is released into Ukraine, given that we have essentially said that we will protect aid spending in Ukraine, I hope that additional money can replace official development assistance going in, so that that ODA money can then support programmes in other countries.

We also have an issue with British International Investment. To be clear, BII does good things, but there is no need for additional capitalisation out of the 0.3% that we have, given that investments in assets can be realised. Finally, I highlight the international finance facility for immunisation, which is a way to leverage extra funding. We are urging the Government to look at other ways to do that in other contexts. There is already an international finance facility for education, and by using such facilities we can leverage funds times 10. Given the various summits that are coming up, including the financing for development conference that my hon. Friend mentioned, I urge the Government to look at those options, and to think innovatively about the additional finance that we can leverage to help to support the poorest people in the world.

10.18 am

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Hobhouse. I thank my the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew)—who cut his teeth in the continent and the country in which I was born, Malawi—for securing this important debate.

We are seeing the dismantling of the world order that we created. I sincerely believe that we stand at a crossroads of not just policy, but principle. The United Kingdom has long prided itself on punching above its weight, not just militarily, but with moral leadership. Having said that, to address the point made by the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (David Taylor), it was Tony Blair—the “hard left”—who said that Putin should have a seat at the table and gave him a pair of silver 10 Downing Street cufflinks.

With our moral leadership, through decades of smart and targeted overseas aid, we have saved lives and shaped the world in our image—an image that is just, resilient and humane. The decision that we have made to cut overseas aid by £6 billion is lowering our commitment, such that overseas aid will be at its lowest level in 25 years. That not only betrays the world's most vulnerable people; it betrays who we are and what we stand for.

Let us be clear: aid is not just about generosity. We all know that. It is also about foresight. I am an optometrist, and this decision is extremely myopic. Aid is about security for us in the long term. It is about stability and recognising that the surest way to keep disease, conflict and extremism from reaching our shores is to invest in preventing them, rather than reacting in panic when they emerge. In my opinion, cutting aid while increasing defence spending is putting the cart before the horse. How can we talk about protecting our nation while we tear down the very programmes that prevent wars, contain pandemics—have we already forgotten covid?—and stabilise fragile regions?

These aid cuts are not just numbers on a spreadsheet; they are unprotected lives, including children who are unprotected because they are unvaccinated, whose futures will be erased. For example, over the past four years our support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has helped to immunise 1 billion children. Now that we are reducing the funds for aid, we risk reversing decades of progress. Measles, polio, typhoid—these are not diseases of the past. They are clawing their way back and our retreat invites them in. We have seen what our aid can do. In just two years, the Reach Initiative helped to boost immunisation rates in conflict zones from 16% to 96%, reaching more than 9 million children. Are we now to abandon those children in the name of “sharpening focus”?

The UK's aid has helped to provide antiretroviral therapy to 23 million people, distributed 133 million malaria nets and, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald), educated more than 1 million girls in the world's hardest places. Are we about to cut this system to meet a political target or to mimic a short-sighted policy from across the Atlantic?

Aid fosters growth over time. Since 1960, the International Development Association has helped 36 countries through loans and grants; 19 of them have seen economic development to such a degree that they are now giving money to the IDA rather than receiving it.

[Shockat Adam]

Let us not kid ourselves. This aid cut is not about leadership; to me, it looks like retreat. While following the USA in gutting aid programmes might seem politically expedient, it is morally bankrupt and strategically reckless. This policy will stoke the very fires that we seek to extinguish—displacement, disease and extremism—and send their embers across the globe. And what of our standing on the world stage? Are we prepared to go from aid superpower to spectator, and to shrug while global poverty, education and health collapse under the weight of our absence? While we pull back, authoritarian regimes are—as we speak—filling the void with their influence, their ideologies and their terms. I believe that we should increase our investment in global health security, not scale it back. Our aid was not charity, in a world still reeling from covid and now facing new disease outbreaks; it was, in fact, an insurance policy against global collapse.

Now is not a time for retreat; it is a time for us to lead, with compassion, clarity and courage. We must not allow short-term politics to cause long-term catastrophe. We must restore our commitment to giving 0.7% of GNI, reassert our leadership in education in particular, global health and crisis response, and protect not just lives overseas, but the future of our nation and the values that we claim to defend.

We are not just donors; we are architects of a safer and more stable world. Let us not dismantle what we have built.

10.24 am

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): It is indeed an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for securing this important debate.

Since the new US Administration took office in January, President Trump and Elon Musk have gutted USAID—the world's foremost dispenser of humanitarian funding and expertise, through which America saved the lives of many of the world's poorest people. Trump's budget proposals to Congress for the coming fiscal year reduce foreign assistance spend by almost 85%, all while the need for it increases. In a deadly year, when 120 armed conflicts raging across the globe, the number of people suffering from acute food insecurity has nearly tripled in six years, from 135 million in 2019 to 340 million today. The nation that previously built development's architecture has largely disappeared almost overnight. There is an urgent need for someone to step up and assume the convening and facilitating role that America once played. Many looked to Britain, and in that month, when we all held our breath, we were blindsided instead by this Labour Government cutting development spending to its lowest level this century.

It is difficult to fully comprehend the scale of the cuts to USAID or their impact. In 2024, America spent roughly \$70 billion on international development. Its contribution represented 40% of all humanitarian aid recorded that year. But it is not just the money. Every other country, international NGO and development body relies on the humanitarian architecture that America built and supported. It was America that funded much of the most valuable data collection, which determined

where other countries directed their resources. NGOs I have spoken to explained how American-funded analysis often provided the early warning system for looming hunger crises. Frequently it was money from the Americans that paid the administrative costs and overheads of NGOs working on the ground. That has been dismantled.

The world is already paying a heavy price for Trump's and Musk's decision to break American development leadership. Since the cuts, Boston University has been running a mathematical model of their likely toll. The model estimates that more than 300,000 people have died already, two thirds of them children. Every hour, the model believes, around another 100 people die. One can watch the number tick up almost in real time. A leaked memo originating with USAID estimated that the cuts would result in 200,000 children each year being paralysed by polio, that 1 million cases of severe acute malnutrition, which often results in death, would go untreated and that malaria would claim an additional 166,000 lives. There is a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding before our eyes. Millions of the world's poorest people, including the poorest children, have lost lifesaving medical care because of those cuts.

Perhaps the heaviest blow of all has fallen upon the global effort to fight HIV and AIDS. The President's emergency plan for AIDS relief, credited with saving 26 million lives in the last two decades, received a 90-day stop work order in January. The Trump Administration have now asked Congress to claw back money, some already allocated to PEPFAR. As a result, the global HIV response has been severely disrupted. Modelling by the Burnet Institute estimates that it will result in a 25% drop in funding for the global HIV response, and as many as 2.9 million excess HIV-related deaths by 2030.

David Mundell: I welcome the hon. Lady's comments. It is very important we emphasise that it is women and girls who will be most affected by those cuts. It is not those stereotypes sometimes presented by some in the US who are affected; it is women and girls.

Monica Harding: The right hon. Member makes an excellent point, which I will come to later.

USAID modelling suggests that the actions of Trump and Musk could result in 28,000 new cases of infectious diseases, such as Ebola, each year. When Ebola ripped through west Africa a decade ago, it had a case fatality of around 40%. It was kept from our shores thanks to a global response in which America and Britain played crucial roles. When we step back from funding and supporting global health initiatives, we put ourselves at risk. I repeat the Liberal Democrats' call for the Government to reaffirm our commitment to the replenishment of Gavi and the Global Fund, because it is the right thing to do for British interests.

There is some hope. The situation is still fluid, and I urge the Government to impress upon the US Administration the moral and strategic imperative for development. Meanwhile, the US Administration have emphasised that America will continue to provide humanitarian aid and respond to disasters, at least to a degree. That is welcome, but if the funding is to be effective it must be provided in accordance with foundational humanitarian principles: impartiality, neutrality and

independence. Israel's Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, an American-backed scheme, disregards those principles. In consequence, it is dangerous, unworkable and profoundly insufficient. I hope the Minister takes this opportunity to affirm Britain's commitment to those principles and to all allies, and to urge American counterparts to do the same.

The decisions taken by the US Administration to slash and gut USAID are profoundly depressing; that our Government have followed their lead is even more so. Britain is withdrawing when our voice is needed more than ever. The slashed UK aid budget cannot fulfil our commitments. We hear that Sudan, Gaza and Ukraine are ringfenced. In the absence of the US, we wonder about those other humanitarian hotspots: Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, DRC, Nigeria, Myanmar, South Sudan, Mali, Haiti and Bangladesh.

We hear that our Government's priorities are conflict, climate change and health. What about women and girls, nutrition and education? At the same time, the Government toy with rhetoric and framing borrowed from the Trump playbook, saying that Britain is no longer a charity. Let us be clear and united: development serves British interests. It is not charity or a giant cash dispenser in the sky, but a deposit account for our safety and security. That is because funding global health is better than battling a pandemic; supporting peacebuilding is cheaper than fighting a war, or dealing with the terrorism that emerges out of instability; and aid in economic development and climate mitigation are better than coping with mass displacement and channel crossings.

Every crisis creates opportunities, and the American withdrawal is no different. While the USA dismantles overseas assistance—ripping out 85% of it, and the plumbing, too—Britain must use its tradition of leadership and step forward as a convening power, with bold and brave thinking and a long-term vision for aid, starting by laying out a road map for returning to 0.7% of GNI, as we are required to do by statute. That law has not changed. I worry about the Government's failure to square that with the notoriously generous British public. The impact of the UK aid cut, alongside the US cut, has not been made clear. It will mean hundreds of thousands of lives lost worldwide.

Instead of short-term decision making and chasing domestic headlines, we must invest in a long-term vision for Britain and security for our future. We have yet to see any script from the Government on what Britain is for. How we behave now will define how we are seen on the world stage. We still have a seat at the table and we may say that we still have the expertise to lead, but if money does not follow, it would be arrogant to assume that we will keep that seat. Britain is compassionate. We do not have to follow America blindly; we can use our proud and long tradition in development and aid, look outwards and lead.

10.33 am

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Hobhouse. I congratulate the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) on securing the debate. It is very timely, coming as it does one day before the Chancellor's spending review announcement.

It is more than three months since the Prime Minister announced the reduction in aid spending, yet we still await a clear picture of what that means, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) eloquently set out. I appreciate that there are challenges for the Minister but, like the international development sector and partners, I still have many unanswered questions about what this means for UK development priorities, especially in the context of changes to USAID.

Decisions about the levels of US aid are, quite rightly, a matter for the US Government, but we should acknowledge that this is the new reality we are working with. It is therefore incumbent on Ministers to be across the changes and the detail, and to understand what they mean for the sector and our partners.

What assessment has the Department made of the impact of the changes to USAID? Understanding where the impact will be is crucial to ensuring that our programmes are as effective as they can be, given the global and domestic context. With that in mind, has the Minister assessed the number of UK aid programmes that are likely to be impacted and which sectors will be most affected? I would also be grateful for an update on her latest discussions with her counterparts in the US, as well as counterparts in other donor countries. Is she aware of any programmes or policy areas that the US is vacating where there might be appropriate opportunities for the UK to take on the mantle and further our own national interest?

Global health, as we have heard today, is an area where the UK has made a significant and positive contribution, for example to Gavi and the Global Fund. In 2020, while we hosted the global vaccine summit, it was the Conservative Government who committed £1.65 billion to Gavi. During the last two Global Fund replenishments, we pledged £1 billion in 2022 and £1.46 billion in 2020. These interventions really do matter: Gavi has saved 18.8 million lives and the Global Fund 65 million. Those are not numbers, but real lives, real people and real results. Sadly, we are yet to see a pledge from this Government.

Another example of global health in action is the Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa programme. By working with African partners and the World Health Organisation to help to detect and tackle future epidemics and drug-resistant infections, the programme was integral to stopping Africa's worst Ebola outbreak in 20 years. It is therefore rather concerning that we read in the press that the programme is at risk. Diseases do not respect borders, and we need to understand the risk of the changes for us at home. What assessment has the Minister made, ahead of the spending review, to inform her about how the global health budget should be managed?

On women and girls, the UK also has a good story to tell. In government, the Conservatives launched the women and girls strategy for 2023-30, which affirmed our commitment to the three Es: education, empowering women and girls, and ending violence. We worked with partners such as Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education, demonstrating how the public and private sectors can work together to achieve maximum impact. Similarly, sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes are, as we have heard today, essential for saving lives and achieving gender equality, and, crucially, for empowering women. This is an area where the UK has a strong record of delivering.

[Wendy Morton]

As we are sadly all too aware, conflict has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Too often, they are locked out of efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, and to build peace. The women, peace and security agenda we championed in government is about building a more representative and effective approach to tackling conflict and advocating for women's rights in an ever more challenging world. It matters because empowered and engaged women make societies more prosperous and more secure. The Minister's colleague, the International Development Minister, recently told the International Development Committee that education and gender are likely to be impacted by the changes to ODA. As a priority, can the Minister therefore help us understand how that will impact on the FCDO's work in women and girls' education, SRHR, maternal health and the broader women, peace and security agenda?

There are so many other areas I would like to raise in the context of changes to USAID. As ever, I am conscious of time, but it is important that we do not lose sight of, for example, strong institutions and capacity building, and tackling corruption and illicit finance. Without that, we cannot help partner countries to become stronger and better allies—something that is increasingly important in today's ever more challenging world.

De-mining in post-conflict and active conflict zones remains crucial. In that area, funding to the Mines Advisory Group and the HALO Trust—great examples of British NGOs—has helped not to just support the clearance of explosives, but to raise awareness of the danger of mines and, crucially, train and build capacity in countries so that they can help to clear the mines themselves.

I would also like to touch on nutrition, which underpins good development. The recent Nutrition for Growth summit in March this year is yet another example of a sector left in limbo where the UK did not make a financial commitment.

It has been clear throughout this debate that there are still many unanswered questions and much uncertainty in the sector. I know that I am not alone in having received answers to written questions telling me to wait for the spending review. My latest tally of such answers is 59, and the story is the same almost regardless of the policy area. Similarly, the Shafik review of international development appears to have been left gathering dust on the Foreign Secretary's desk. There are so many unanswered questions, creating much uncertainty in an ever-changing and complex world of conflict.

I have a specific and topical question to press the Minister on regarding ODA spending on Chagos. What funds from ODA will be used as part of the payments and support for Mauritius under Labour's Chagos surrender deal?

Finally, how have the changes to USAID impacted the Minister's decisions on UK development priorities? Has her Department made a full sector-by-sector, country-by-country impact assessment ahead of tomorrow's spending review that takes into account the new development landscape we are operating in?

As we adjust to the new reality with respect to USAID, it is vital that the UK is alive to the impact on our international development programmes while ensuring effectiveness in our delivery. Like many hon. and right

hon. Members, I am sure, I remain patient and will wait until the spending review tomorrow, but let me reassure the Minister and her Department that if I am left with more questions than answers after that, I will keep asking those questions.

Wera Hobhouse (in the Chair): I ask the Minister to leave a couple of minutes for the lead Member to wind up.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse, and to have heard such excellent speeches from the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew), my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald) and others who have direct experience in this important field.

To repeat the words of the Minister for Development in the other place, this is a very difficult time for the development sector. The world is changing and the post-world war two consensus is under significant strain. We face increasingly complex, interconnected and politically charged global issues. As we have heard, cuts to USAID, combined with funding decisions by other donors, including the UK, will have significant implications for tackling global development challenges. We are working closely with partners to understand the impact and provide support.

The right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) mentioned that she has asked lots of questions, which is, of course, part of her job as spokesperson. However, she might want to cast her mind back to the period between February 2020 and December 2021, when she was the Minister and got the axe out so quickly that there were in-year funding cuts, job losses and an enormous tremor across the sector. I remember many people coming to see me, as the Opposition spokesperson, and saying, "Could the Government not at least take a considered view over time, not rush to do these things and try to have some respect for the sector?"

Wendy Morton: In my comments, I was appreciative of the challenges that any Government faces in such circumstances. However, I gently remind the Minister that this is now happening on her Government's watch and, as she rightly acknowledges, my job as the shadow development Minister is to keep asking those questions. What the sector needs is certainty, and the Government clearly have not learned that.

Catherine West: On the tone of the speech by the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), we should also remember the 2010 to 2015 period, when cut after cut in public funding inflicted quite a deal of pain on the recipients of that public funding.

Monica Harding: Does the Minister agree, though, that after receiving a note from the Labour Government saying there was no more money left, the coalition Government increased the aid budget to 0.7%? In fact, 0.7% of gross national income has been in the Lib Dem manifesto since 1970. When we were in government, we delivered it; when we left government, it was cut.

Catherine West: I think the hon. Lady may have a good debating point in this Chamber, but the result of the 2015 election says it all.

David Taylor: I want to add to what the Minister is saying. The point is that, yes, the coalition Government did protect the aid budget, but by cutting public services in this country to the core, they undermined public trust in Government. That meant that lots of people faced need, and it led to increasing calls of, "Charity begins at home; why are we spending this money abroad?" If we had kept the settlement that we had under the last Labour Government, whereby we invested in public services at home and abroad, we would not have ended up in this mess.

Catherine West: I think we are all making the important point that since the 2008 global crash, our economy has never really been the same and we have struggled to make progress, whether on wages and living conditions at home or on completely fulfilling our responsibilities abroad. As one says, we are where we are. General reductions in public spending are part of a broader set of pressures facing the international development system.

Support for multilateralism has been wavering for some time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (David Taylor) said, amid shifting geopolitical priorities. Many of our partners feel that the current system no longer responds to their needs. The combined impact of these two factors is significant, and let me briefly expand on them.

First, on the disbanding of USAID, it is inevitable that significant cuts will have lasting implications for how we tackle global development challenges. I cannot say how pleased I am that the International Development Committee will go to the USA to have face-to-face dialogue with friends about how we can save the most important elements of our programmes. Given the knowledge base of the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), who is well known for his work on global health, HIV/AIDS, Gavi, Unitaid and the Global Fund, he will be able to make pertinent arguments with friends there. I would also ask the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), with his connections in the faith sector, to impress on all the different faith-based charities the need to continue their important work where they can and to have many people doubling their tithe.

Jim Shannon: I have suggested this in the past, because there is a real possibility of doing good things together: those organisations would be keen to work alongside Government through their NGOs, if that was possible. I think I have asked the Minister this before, but I am interested in whether she would be sympathetic to that idea.

Catherine West: I will certainly pass that idea back to the Minister with responsibility for development, because we always end up having good ideas in Westminster Hall debates.

The US is a key partner, but this is a matter for them. It is their budget. We have a strong relationship with the US that is founded on shared interests and common approaches. Together with our G7 and G20 allies, we carry strong global influence, and we must never stand back from that. That is why we are committed to

working with the US and other countries on our shared priorities. We are in regular touch with US counterparts to share advice as they shape their development plans. As in any diplomatic relationship, we will not always align with the US, and we may want to focus on other things. That is normal. We will engage in a pragmatic way to understand concerns and find a way forward.

Many Members have mentioned the multilateral system. No single country can solve the global development challenges alone, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North for pointing that out as well as the importance of working with international financial institutions, which she learned through her experience before coming to this place. This is where we have to be much more innovative. We cannot just sit around the table and nod through reports; we have to put some life back into those systems so that we can enable the finance and the technical aid, which the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale also mentioned. Through technical assistance and international financial organisations, we are not powerless—we can use them. There is an opportunity to rebuild trust, rebalance power and design a more effective, inclusive, co-operative and future-proof architecture.

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton, mentioned the 1970s. We must not forget, at a moment like this, what the development sector has done. So many more people lived in abject poverty before, and there is now a growing middle class, and much of that is down to really bright people, employed by NGOs in those countries, who are leading movements and improving the economy. Under 10% of people are now living at the poorest level, which used to be on \$1 a day. The development Minister will know the statistic, but it has reduced to 9%. This debate, as well as lots of other evidence, is going into the spending review so that decisions can be made. We know that a preponderance of those people live in sub-Saharan Africa, and that is being taken into account.

Alice Macdonald: The other concentration of people living in extreme poverty is in conflict-affected states. As much as this is about providing humanitarian aid once disaster happens, we also have to invest in prevention in the first place. Would the Minister reflect on the importance of conflict prevention in our aid efforts?

Catherine West: Indeed. This is about not just aid, but the women, peace and security programme, which I spoke at in Manila a couple of months back, and the important work that we do in Colombia, Mindanao in the Philippines and other places to ensure that women have a voice. I am very aware that many Members in this Chamber understand the importance of empowering women to solve the difficulties relating to how communities live abroad in very poor or conflict-affected areas. The Government will continue their commitment to supporting women and girls by being a champion for them across the world—by showing up and making our voice heard. Quite a few international partners have mentioned to me at conferences that I am the first UK Minister they have seen for years. This is partly about our diplomatic presence, including at ministerial level, so that we can be confident champions of women and girls in our multilateral work, and improve the quality of mainstreaming in our growth, climate, health and humanitarian programmes.

Wendy Morton: Can the Minister confirm that the Government are still committed to ensuring that half our development budget goes to women and girls?

Catherine West: It would be unwise of me, the day before the spending review, to give an exact figure. However, I reassure the right hon. Member that we will give extra-special attention to working with women's organisations, particularly local organisations in crisis and climate-affected contexts, which I know are close to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North. We will mainstream gender equality to put women and girls at the heart of everything we do.

We now have a champion for women, Baroness Harman. Some Members may remember her from this House, and she is not to be taken lightly. She will go over our proposals with a fine-toothed comb and support the work we do to help women political and economic leaders, like her, and activists in their home countries—those who have real legitimacy with their populations—to ensure that development and humanitarian programmes integrate women's perspectives and needs, and address the barriers that they face. That is as relevant in conflict and peacebuilding as it is in education.

I will make some further brief points on global health. We will continue to invest in multilateral funds such as Gavi and the Global Fund. I know many here are champions of that work. There was an emphasis in this debate on child nutrition, which is paramount.

Moving on to the question of climate and nature, we will tackle climate change by backing investments that help countries to grow green and resilient economies. When we consider the COP meetings abroad, we see, following disasters and emergencies, that there is so much poverty and so much aid has to be spent. We must work harder through our financial institutions to bring forward prevention schemes for very climate-affected areas. Pakistan and the speech that Sherry Rehman made at COP two years ago come to mind, as do the Pacific islands—an area that my brief covers—which are literally under threat of sinking. Those are the sorts of areas where climate interventions are crucial and where climate will continue to be a very important point.

Members have mentioned some of the real hotspots we are looking at at the moment, including Yemen, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Myanmar, and I will briefly emphasise the importance of our humanitarian response. Colleagues will remember that following the dreadful earthquake in Sagaing in Myanmar, through support from the UK public together with the Disasters Emergency Committee match-funding UK citizens' contributions, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office was able to provide £25 million in total, equivalent to China, to those who were suffering. The International Development Committee has heard from Dr Sasa and

others from outside Myanmar who are championing proper political reform, so that less aid will eventually be required once the political system gets up and running there.

Afghanistan has been mentioned as a crucial area, particularly for women and girls. I want briefly to talk up the importance of the BBC World Service and its Bitesize learning modules, through which women can listen to the radio and learn English and other basic subjects. That came out of covid, and it is an example of excellence. When a young mother with perhaps eight or nine children is washing their clothes, she can listen to English and hope one day to be able to use that to empower her and her family, and also hopefully to have an improved future. Those sorts of interventions are incredibly important.

The UK remains committed to playing a leading role in international development. We will work with our partners, including the US and the global south. I thank all the Members who have spoken in this debate. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman) did sound very evangelical in his speech, I liked it. I think it is important that we do have a moral heart in a lot of the work we do. We know that working with the US and the global south to reimagine a development system that meets our shared priorities, builds new partnerships, and harnesses the power of trade, AI, technology and private capital will not be quick or easy. But by working together, we can build a system that is inclusive, effective and gives voice to all who have a stake in it.

10.58 am

Brian Mathew: I thank everyone who has spoken today; I am minded of the words of Jo Cox, who said that there is more that unites us than divides us. If we look back to the formation of the original Overseas Development Administration, that was under a Labour Government, as was the Department for International Development. But it was under the Lib Dem-Conservative coalition that the 0.7% of GNI was reached, so we have much to be proud of in terms of what we have done and what we need to do. The hon. Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald) mentioned the “Make Poverty History” speech by Nelson Mandela in Trafalgar Square. I was there, right at the front of the crowd. It was a proud day indeed.

I will end with another quote from JFK, because I think it is important to focus our minds. We choose to do the right things

“not because they are easy, but because they are hard”.

We need to stand up for aid and for people. Let us focus our minds on that and not just on rhetoric. The buck stops not just in Washington, but here.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Demand

11 am

Wera Hobhouse (in the Chair): The convention for 30-minute debates is that the lead Member makes a speech, to which the Minister responds, and only with prior permission can another Member make a speech. More and more, it has become the norm that Members intervene quite a lot. That is not really the point of a 30-minute debate, but I remind Members of the convention that the Chair should be informed by any Member who wishes to intervene.

11.1 am

Tracy Gilbert (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling demand for prostitution and sex trafficking.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse. There is a group of people who do not get talked about enough in Parliament. In fact, they are rarely mentioned in public at all. We seldom hear from them directly, and we rarely knowingly encounter them on our screens or in person. It is almost as if they are invisible. I suspect that that is how they would like to remain, because if we heard what they said and saw what they did, we would want to stop them. This group of people is men who pay for sex.

Sex buyers rely on being unseen while they ruin lives, leaving us as a society and the individual women to pick up the pieces of the carnage they cause. The demand from men who pay for sex fuels a brutal prostitution and sex trafficking trade. It funds predatory websites that make millions of pounds advertising women for sexual exploitation every day and causes untold trauma to some of society's most vulnerable women while undermining equality for all women.

This debate is an opportunity to bring the demand for sex and sex trafficking out of the shadows and into the spotlight. Who are the men who create this demand? To answer that, I will read their own words, written on a website on which men anonymously rate and review women who they have paid for sex:

"No smile, her atrocious English made the interactions even more impossible."

"I asked for OW"

—oral without a condom—

"which she did reluctantly...This was a very sub-standard service from someone who is not interested in providing customer satisfaction."

"She basically just laid back, shut her eyes and let me get on with it. She made no noises. I put up with about 5 minutes of her lying there-like a side of beef before sitting up."

"Bad attitude. Everything was off limits."

"Finally, I got her to lay there, but it's like shagging a dead fish."

I am sure we can all agree that those remarks are sickening. Men who buy sex review women as if they are reviewing an Xbox game. Those comments prove that men who pay for sex treat women as subordinate sex objects whose role is to service their sexual desires, and they represent just a handful of the approximately 28,000 reviews left on one sex buyers website.

Researcher Alessia Tranchese found that the most misogynistic reviews were posted about women disrupting buyers' fantasies, such as failing to adequately pretend that they wanted to have sex with these men. Negative reviews of women were used as a tool to control their behaviour—publicly punishing resistance while rewarding compliance with their sexual demands. Sex buyers may delude themselves into thinking that paying money absolves them of responsibility for subjecting vulnerable women to unwanted sex, but the opposite is true. It is not possible to commodify sexual consent; the money is coercion. As the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women and girls states:

"prostitution is intrinsically linked to different forms of violence against women and girls and constitutes a form of violence in and of itself."

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this debate forward. It is a hard subject to speak about and it is incredibly hard to listen to—not because of the hon. Lady, but because the subject content is so graphic. I know that the hon. Lady is aware of the Northern Ireland legislation, but does she agree that there is a need to make profiting from the prostitution of others illegal with criminal repercussions? The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 does this. Will she join me in calling for UK-wide legislation to protect vulnerable men and women from the exploitative sex industry? I know that the Minister is always keen to answer, and she does well.

Tracy Gilbert: I will come to that later, and yes, I do agree with those comments.

The most recent research into the scale of paying for sex found that 3.6% of men in the UK report having paid for sex in the previous five years. Men who are most likely to have paid for sex are single, aged from 25 to 34, in managerial or professional occupations, and report high numbers of sexual partners. Shockingly, but not surprisingly, it was revealed last month that multiple members of the Scottish Parliament have paid for sex. We can only predict that Members or former Members of this House have too.

Demand is not inevitable, and the law plays a pivotal role in whether this minority of men choose to pay for sex. In one UK study, researchers asked over 1,200 sex buyers whether they would change their behaviour if a law was introduced that made paying for sex a crime. Over half said that they would definitely, probably or possibly change their behaviour. While sex buyers are driven by male sexual entitlement, ultimately, they do it because they can. The law is not just failing to stop these men; it is making it easy. Not only is paying for sex legal in England, Wales and Scotland, so are the pimping websites advertising thousands of women each day for sex buyers to choose from.

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this debate. Does she agree that pimping websites are facilitating sex trafficking of women, making it easier for traffickers and organised crime groups to profit from the dehumanising, violence, exploitation and trade of vulnerable women?

Tracy Gilbert: These websites function as massive online brothels. They are the go-to place for traffickers to advertise their victims. I have said it before and I will say it again: pimping websites are making it as easy to order a room and to sexually exploit as it is to order a takeaway.

I want to talk about the women who face the devastating consequences of prostitution and sex trafficking for the rest of their lives. In a 2016 inquiry, the Home Affairs Committee found that a number of prostitutes were in a vulnerable position. Evidence from St Mungo's showed that one in four women living in its housing services was a current or former prostitute. Its evidence also showed that, of its residents who had experienced rough sleeping, one in three was a current or former prostitute. In 2022, *Beyond the Streets* published a report by Grayce Collis and Dr Katie Thorlby that found that 78% of women actively seeking support to leave prostitution needed support with their mental health, while 71% needed support with their relationships with friends and family, which are often broken, and 63% needed support to access employment and education. Tragically, a database managed by National Ugly Mugs recorded 180 murders of prostitutes across the UK between 1990 and 2016. Evidence from Agenda to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry stated that

"Women in prostitution are 18 times more likely to be murdered than the general female population."

Behind those statistics are vulnerable women, who all too often feel there is no escape from the exploitation they face. Fiona Broadfoot told Sky News in 2018 that she was physically abused and exploited by her pimp from the age of 15. She detailed how she was introduced into prostitution within two weeks of first meeting him. She was arrested; her pimp was not. Her criminal convictions have followed her out of prostitution, resulting in employment and education opportunities being snatched from her.

Operation Fasthold, a joint operation between Police Scotland and the Home Office, showed that women are trafficked into the UK to meet this demand. In that case, it was mainly women from east Asia, uprooted and coerced into prostitution, afterwards finding themselves at the mercy of our asylum process, stuck in low-paid work or at the hands of another criminal gang. In Edinburgh, over this weekend, 142 women were advertised for prostitution on one website alone. Five of the top 10 adverts are explicitly posted by so-called agencies, so the site does not even try to hide the organised nature of this exploitation.

The devastation and exploitation of women continues, and something has to change. The law must deter demand for prostitution and sex trafficking, and reflect the reality that prostitution is violence against women by holding perpetrators and profiteers to account and, crucially, by supporting victims. A growing number of countries and states have adopted this approach: outlawing paying for sex and profiteering from the prostitution of others, while decriminalising victims of sexual exploitation and providing support and exit services. Those countries include France, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Their experiences show that demand for sex buyers and the trafficking of women to meet that demand can and must be deterred.

Joani Reid (East Kilbride and Strathaven) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this crucial debate to Westminster Hall today. I wonder whether she has noticed the private Members' Bill tabled by Ash Regan of the Scottish Parliament, which looks to do exactly what she has described by decriminalising the sale of sex. Would she like to congratulate Ash Regan and wish her luck with her Bill?

Tracy Gilbert: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention; I will come back to that point later in my speech.

Sweden was the first country to criminalise paying for sex while decriminalising victims of sexual exploitation. The more than two decades since the introduction of its 1999 Sex Purchase Act have provided evidence of its effectiveness. Since that pioneering Act was introduced, demand has dropped significantly, public attitudes have been transformed and traffickers are being deterred. An analysis by the European Commission concluded that the Act, coupled with proactive policing, "has created a less conducive context for trafficking."

In Ireland, an evaluation by researchers at University College Dublin reported that, under the country's demand-reduction legislation, there was

"an increased willingness amongst women"

in prostitution

"to report crimes committed against them and in their improved relationship with Gardai overall."

In France, there is strong public support for the demand-reduction laws, which is significant given the importance of changing public attitudes and deterring sex buying. An Ipsos survey found that 78% of the French public support the legislation on prostitution, and 74% think that prostitution is violence.

Demand for prostitution and trafficking is not inevitable, and the law has a critical role to play in deterring it. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride and Strathaven (Joani Reid) mentioned, I welcome the Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill, introduced to the Scottish Parliament by Ash Regan MSP, which looks to replicate the lessons learned from other European countries. I hope that all Members of Scottish Parliament will consider the legislation carefully and support it as it makes its way through Parliament. I am keen to hear from the Minister whether UK Government will be looking to bring forward similar legislation.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on commercial sexual exploitation and has tabled amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill to outlaw pimping and paying for sex, and to decriminalise victims of sexual exploitation by removing sanctions for soliciting. I am proud to be among the more than 50 Members of Parliament who are signatories to those amendments.

The proposed reforms are backed by survivors and best-practice frontline support services, such as the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance in Scotland, nia, Women@TheWell and Kairos, whose representatives I recently met and heard from. These vital amendments will help the Government to meet our manifesto commitment to halve violence against women and girls by reducing the demand for prostitution. I urge Ministers to accept the amendments, and I am keen to hear the Minister's views on which amendments may be accepted.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Gateshead South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and I congratulate her on securing this debate, however short—we are all managing to squeeze little bits in. Does she agree that those who argue that outlawing pimping websites will just drive this all underground are absolutely wrong? Actually, the reverse is seen: prosecution rates go up, so the demand decreases.

Tracy Gilbert: I agree. One piece of misinformation surrounding the actions that I have proposed is that outlawing pimping websites would simply displace trafficking to the dark web, making no impact on the scale of sexual exploitation. That claim lacks both logic and evidence. Advertising victims of sex trafficking on the dark web carries multiple disadvantages and barriers for both traffickers and sex buyers. It requires technical expertise from the traffickers to post the adverts and from sex buyers to locate and access the adverts. Advertising on the dark web would substantially restrict the customer base that traffickers could access via their adverts, as well as making it harder to advertise victims in the first place.

A similar myth is that outlawing paying for sex would just drive prostitution underground, making it harder to identify victims and perpetrators, and have no impact on the scale of offending. There is a logical fallacy underlying that claim: men who pay for sex must be able to locate women to sexually exploit. Police officers' support services can look at exactly the same adverts as sex buyers to locate victims and perpetrators. In short, if sex buyers can find the women being exploited, so can the police.

Perhaps the most destructive myth of all is that being paid to perform sex acts is work, making the men who pay women for sex ordinary consumers. We need to be absolutely clear as policymakers and as a Parliament that there is no such thing as sex work. Giving someone money, accommodation, food or other goods or services in exchange for a sex act is sexual exploitation and abuse. It is never acceptable, and our laws must reflect that.

I thank hon. Members for making the time to attend today's debate. I hope that, together, we can start to end this exploitation of women. I conclude with the words of Mia de Faoite, a survivor of prostitution, who said that demand reduction legislation that criminalises sex buyers and decriminalises victims works because it puts sex buyers

“at risk of bringing what they do in the dark into who they are in the day.”

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Hobhouse. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Tracy Gilbert) for securing the debate. The depth of her knowledge and passion about this issue was obvious as she spoke. The men she spoke of in her opening remarks, and the reviews that she read out—she could have read out some that were considerably worse, so the House may appreciate the editing—are utterly despicable. Those men disgust me in their attitude towards women generally, and the suggestion

that they should be able to pay for somebody's horror and then give them a bad review should not sit well with anyone.

Like my hon. Friend, I have a long-standing interest in these issues. I have worked for many years with women trafficked for sex, women sold into sexual slavery from childhood and women forced into sexual exploitation essentially through their circumstances. Today, I still very regularly meet such people. I met some women who were in that situation, or had been in it historically, just last week. We all want to be driven by their voices. I am deeply grateful to everyone who continues to advocate for action to tackle demand for prostitution and sex trafficking and for better support for victims and survivors to recover. The idea that people should be criminalised for it is something that worries us all.

Before I respond to some of the specific points, it is worth outlining that sexual exploitation can take different forms. The trafficking of individuals for sexual exploitation is modern slavery. The demand for sexual services is undoubtedly driving that horrific crime. The profit that criminals are making from that exploitation makes it even more sickening. For too long, women and vulnerable people have been trapped in sexual exploitation under the guise of prostitution. The daily abuse that they suffer is truly horrific, and my hon. Friend spoke to that.

Any individual who wants to leave prostitution, or who has been sexually exploited, must be given the opportunities to find routes out and to recover. Let us be clear about the scale of this problem; the nature of it makes it difficult to accurately estimate the numbers, but it is something that we have looked at. Research commissioned by the Home Office and conducted by the University of Bristol found that it is not possible to produce a single prevalence estimate for prostitution; however, it assessed a number of existing estimates made over the last 25 years, which range from 35,882 to 104,964 people.

We know that potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation make up a large proportion of referrals to the national referral mechanism, which is the framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery to appropriate support. The most recent statistics show that in 2024 sexual exploitation either partly or wholly accounted for 3,266, or 17%, of all referrals. Of those who are sexually exploited, the majority were female, at 79%. However, prosecutions under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 do not reflect that.

I am determined to see more trafficking offenders brought to justice. In my modern slavery action plan, I have set out actions we will take together with criminal justice system partners to improve criminal justice outcomes for all modern slavery offences, including the trafficking of individuals for sexual exploitation. Prostitution offences and modern slavery are complex and multifaceted crimes, which are often linked to other offending, and people are often victims of multiple elements. Because of that, we have a multifaceted approach, including the tackling violence against women and girls strategy, a commitment to halve violence against women and girls crimes within a decade, and our modern slavery action plan. We will continue to tackle the threat from all angles.

It is clear that much more must be done. We must go further to prevent sexual exploitation by supporting law enforcement to identify and prosecute exploiters and by

[*Jess Phillips*]

disrupting the sexual exploitation that is facilitated by online platforms, as hon. Members have mentioned. More broadly, through Safer Streets, we have committed to halving violence against women and girls in a decade. That effort will be underpinned by the new VAWG strategy to be published this year. I do not want to step on its toes and say what will be in it, as it has not yet been published. I would also probably be fired if I did—actually, I do not think I would be. For the first time, adult sexual exploitation, and the proper understanding of it, will be reflected. As we develop the new strategy and work to tackle modern slavery, we are considering how to tackle the issues raised today and ensure that victims and survivors are supported to recover.

I suspect that everyone in this Chamber is aware of the ongoing debates about the legislative approaches that have been mentioned. I look forward to having further conversations with my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi)—I have already spoken to her many times about this—when the Crime and Policing Bill reaches Report stage next week. Anyone who has worked with me on such issues knows that my primary focus is on outcomes that improve lives.

I want to stress this clearly: legislation alone does nothing. It is illegal to commit domestic abuse—welcome to the world. Twenty-five per cent of referrals to the national referral mechanism come from children being forced into slavery for drug trafficking, but drugs are illegal. The idea that we can write something into legislation that, in and of itself, will solve this problem overnight is absolutely for the birds. The illegality of drugs has not stopped the trafficking of children for drugs in our country, so we have to look at legislative models and at what will actually work. I am only interested in actual outcomes.

As the Minister, I will use every lever available to me to clamp down on sexual exploitation. The Government's position will be informed by the views of victims and survivors, the voluntary and community sector, which works directly with victims and survivors, the police and others.

In the time I have left, I want to talk about adult service websites. As Members are aware, the online space is a significant enabler of sexual exploitation, and

our response needs to reflect that. Online platforms must be responsible and held accountable for the content on their sites, and must take proactive steps to prevent criminals from using their sites. We are implementing the Online Safety Act 2023, which sets out priority offences, including sexual exploitation and human trafficking offences. Online platforms now have a duty to assess the risk of illegal harms on their services. As of 17 March, they need to implement safety measures to protect users from illegal content, such as that set out in Ofcom's codes of practice, or face significant penalties.

We are going further. Clause 13 of the Crime and Policing Bill will equip law enforcement with new tools to disrupt sexual exploitation that is facilitated through online platforms. Law enforcement will be able to apply to the courts for an order to suspend the IP and domain names for the specified period of up to 12 months when they are being used for serious crime, including offences relating to sexual exploitation—it will not take us very long to find one that is. We are in the foothills of this legislation being rolled out, but I look forward to some clear action being taken.

The Government are further supporting law enforcement to tackle the drivers of trafficking and sexual exploitation through operational activity aimed at tackling modern slavery threats and targeting prolific perpetrators. The Government will keep policies to tackle online enablers of sexual exploitation under review. We want to ensure online companies fulfil their duty to eradicate exploitation from their sites, and we will take further action to achieve that if necessary.

To those sites—those of us who have worked in this area know what they are—I say this. We are coming for you; the law is not on your side. You must be cleaned up or further regulation will have to come. We cannot have sites on which people can buy and sell human beings.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith for securing this debate, and I look forward to the debates that we will have as the legislation progresses.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme: Capital Disregard

[CHRISTINE JARDINE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of introducing a capital disregard for payments made to UK residents under the Republic of Ireland's Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine, and to introduce this debate. I welcome the Minister and thank him for giving his time to this important matter. I thank Members from across the House who are present today and have been so supportive. Ahead of this debate, over 100 MPs and peers on a cross-party basis signed an open letter in support of Philomena's law. That included nearly every mainstream party in Britain and Northern Ireland. In the Public Gallery, we are joined by Irish community organisations and survivors, as well as Philomena Lee's family—her daughter Jane and grandson Joshua.

I will begin by reminding Members what happened to Philomena Lee. Philomena was 18 years old when she became pregnant, and as a result was sent to Sean Ross Abbey mother and baby home in Roscrea, County Tipperary, in Ireland. There, Philomena gave birth to her son, Anthony. They lived there for three years before she was forced to give him up for adoption. Anthony was sold to a couple in the United States; Philomena would never see him again.

Philomena's story brought the scandal of Ireland's mother and baby homes to a global audience through the Oscar-nominated film "Philomena", where she is played by Dame Judi Dench. The film also stars Steve Coogan, who plays Martin Sixsmith, the BBC journalist who helped Philomena Lee in her heartbreaking search for her son. I am delighted that Philomena's law has the support of Philomena Lee and her family, as well as the public backing of Steve Coogan. This campaign to change the law seeks justice for thousands of women like Philomena and their children, who were resident in Ireland's mother and baby homes.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate. I and many others have watched the film. Does he agree that although many of us are very critical of the media—I am among them—on this occasion, a matter was brought to wider attention that otherwise might not have been? We owe a debt of gratitude to all those who were involved in the broadcasting of such a film.

Liam Conlon: I completely agree, and it shows the power of film and culture to tell such stories.

Mother and baby homes were open in Ireland for more than seven decades until the 1990s. During that time, 56,000 so-called fallen women were sent to those cruel institutions, and 57,000 children were born or placed in them. The women's only crime was the perceived sin of becoming pregnant outside of marriage. There they suffered the most horrific mistreatment and abuse. Women were used as unpaid labour. Others, like Philomena,

had their children forcibly adopted, sometimes overseas, never to be seen again. Too many women died in these institutions, and infant mortality was shockingly high.

Many survivors who escaped moved to Britain as a direct result of the mistreatment they experienced in mother and baby homes. In some cases, they came because they thought that disappearing from Ireland was the only way to protect their families' reputations. Thousands came to this country for a fresh start and to build a new life, but they carried with them a great deal of internalised shame as well as the secret of what had happened to them. For lots of survivors, including Philomena, it was not until much later in life that they felt able to confront what had happened to them and share the details of those traumatic years with their families, often revealing long-lost relatives in the process.

It was a significant day in 2021 when survivors finally received an apology from the then Taoiseach Micheál Martin for what he described as:

"the profound, generational wrong visited upon Irish mothers and their children".

That was followed by the mother and baby institutions payment scheme to provide compensation for what happened to them. The scheme opened to applications in March 2021. It represents a measure of accountability for what happened and aims to acknowledge the suffering, and improve the circumstances, of former residents of mother and baby homes.

However, for more than 13,000 survivors living in Britain today, what was meant to be a token of acknowledgement and apology has ended up becoming an additional burden. That is because under our current rules, any money accepted through the payment scheme is considered to be savings, and it could see recipients lose any means-tested benefits—such as housing benefit, pension credit or financial support for social care—that they receive.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): I pay tribute to the fantastic work carried out by Irish Community Services in Bexleyheath in my constituency. It is supporting a number of survivors who are in those circumstances and would lose their means-tested benefit. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to look at disregarding the rules, so that survivors can keep both their compensation and any benefit that they are entitled to?

Liam Conlon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The work of Irish Community Services in Bexleyheath is outstanding, and I will discuss some of the work of other community groups shortly. We absolutely need to see an indefinite disregard.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member not only on securing this debate, but on leading the charge on this issue in the House and commanding such enormous and widespread cross-party support. Does he agree that justice delayed is justice denied? We all agree with what he is calling for, and we hope the Minister may agree with it later, too. However, it is not good enough just to agree. There is a real urgency about getting justice for those women who were affected, and for their descendants and families, to whom we all pay tribute.

Liam Conlon: Absolutely. I thank the hon. Member for being the constituency MP of the real-life Philomena, whom I know she has been supporting. She is right that for many of these survivors, the clock is running.

Broadly speaking, impacted survivors now find themselves in one of three situations. Some accepted compensation before realising the negative impact that it could have. Other survivors have received an offer of compensation, but they have delayed accepting it because of the uncertainty around how their benefits or social care might be impacted. Finally, there are survivors who are not making an application at all until the picture becomes clearer.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his tireless campaigning on this important issue alongside Irish community groups here in the UK. As he will know, thousands of survivors left Ireland for Britain, with huge numbers of them settling in the north-west. They were scarred by the physical and emotional abuse that they had faced, but they were also disturbed by the ease with which powerful institutions could abuse their power without question. Does he agree that more needs to be done to reassure survivors that those administering the scheme will be trauma-informed and act solely in the interests of survivors, and that those who apply for compensation will suffer no detriment to their current entitlements?

Liam Conlon: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for her campaigning on this issue. I know that she is a tireless advocate of the Irish community in Salford, of which she is part. She is absolutely right, and I discussed this issue with Patricia Carey, the survivors' advocate, in Dublin over Easter.

There are survivors who will not make an application at all until the picture becomes clearer, and that is contributing to the incredibly low take-up of the scheme by eligible survivors in Britain. At just 5%, the take-up rate here falls far behind that in Ireland. Unfortunately, the age profile of many eligible applicants means that delays in making applications or accepting offers risk people not living long enough to benefit from the compensation that they are due.

Let me give just one recent example. A man who was born into a mother and baby home became so concerned about the impact that any compensation would have on his benefits that he held off making a decision for as long as possible. Sadly, after finally accepting the offer, he passed away within a matter of months, unable to benefit from the compensation that he was due. I think we can all agree that the situation is unjust.

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and for securing this debate. It is clear to me and to all of us who support his campaign that it is about justice. Does he agree that the low uptake of the scheme might also be down to a significant amount of internalised shame, as expressed by my own family members who have been affected by this? What he is doing today is putting a full stop to that shame and drawing a line to say that this will never happen again in any of our institutions, in Ireland or in the UK.

Liam Conlon: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend, and I know that she has a strong personal connection to this issue. She is right to note that for decades women

lived under a cloud of secrecy and shame. Having the conversation publicly in this campaign is partly to deliver justice and also to tackle the stigma of being in a mother and baby home.

Philomena's law seeks to right that wrong. It proposes the introduction of what is called a capital disregard, which would mean that any compensation from the scheme is ringfenced. It would enable survivors to apply for and accept the payments without fear that doing so would negatively affect their benefits. There is strong precedent for such a solution. The same mechanism has been used for many other special compensation schemes in the past, including supporting the victims of Windrush, those affected by the 7/7 and Manchester bombings, the blood contamination scandal and many more. One change in the law could have a significant impact on the lives of thousands of survivors, and that is what the campaign seeks to deliver.

Before I conclude, I want to turn to the many Irish community and civic society organisations, some of which are represented here today. For many years, they have done vital work to support survivors across the country. I am delighted that we are joined by Rosa from Irish in Britain, Patrick from the Fréa Network, Séan and Katie from the London Irish Centre, Noelette from the Luton Irish Forum, Manisha and Simon from the Coventry Irish Society and so many more. From family tracing to support groups and counselling, to practical help with payment scheme applications, those groups are on the frontline, working around the clock to get the best possible outcomes for survivors.

Ireland's mother and baby homes were cruel institutions. More than 100,000 women and children were either placed in them or born there. Thousands of them suffered horrific mistreatment and abuse and were forced to live under a cloud of secrecy and shame. After decades of campaigning, survivors finally received an apology from the Irish Government and access to a redress scheme, but 13,000 survivors living in Britain today are at risk of not being able to access compensation without the fear of losing means-tested benefits.

That is by default rather than by design, but it is firmly within our gift to correct it. Philomena's law, named after the courageous Philomena Lee, and in tribute to every survivor in Britain, will do just that by ringfencing payments. We can do it; we have done it already for victims of other scandals, including blood contamination and Windrush. Although I appreciate that it is unprecedented to ringfence payments from a foreign Government, everything is unprecedented until it happens. We have an opportunity, through Philomena's law, to help to deliver justice and, in doing so, show thousands of women and children survivors the empathy, kindness and respect they have so often been denied throughout their lives.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate. I should also mention there is likely to be a vote shortly, at which point we will suspend the sitting for 15 minutes to allow Members to vote.

2.43 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for

Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) for securing today's debate and congratulate him on bringing forward a ten-minute rule Bill on Philomena's law. I am proud to put my name to that Bill as a co-sponsor, particularly as I represent a significant Irish diaspora in my constituency, with close ties between the UK and Ireland. I hope the Minister understands the importance of those ties.

As has already been outlined, Philomena's law is named after Philomena Lee, who was 18 when she became pregnant and was sent to the Sean Ross Abbey mother and baby home in Roscrea, County Tipperary, where she gave birth to her son Anthony and lived for three years before being forced to give him up for adoption. We have heard about the Oscar-nominated film "Philomena", which told the story of her painstaking search to be reunited with Anthony.

Philomena's story sadly struck a chord for thousands of mothers and their children who not only suffered in those cruel institutions, but were ever changed by the lasting mark it made on their lives. With great thanks to Luton Irish Forum, which does brilliant work supporting our Irish diaspora, I am honoured to share a snippet of the story of my constituent, Christina, who is here today. She has been really courageous in sharing her story and allowing me to mention her in my speech.

Christina was born in a mother and baby home in Rathdrum, County Wicklow. Christina's mother escaped and ran away with her just weeks after her birth, but subsequently left Christina on the doorstep of a church in Dublin. Christina spent much of her life being passed from foster family to foster family, where she experienced physical abuse, taunting and humiliation, including from those caring for her and neighbours on the street where she lived. She eventually reconnected with her mother during her teenage years, after hiring a detective to track her down, and realised that she was living in Dublin, just minutes from where Christina was working in a factory.

Unfortunately Christina and her mother never forged a close relationship, but it is important to ensure that these stories are heard, because the trauma Christina endured and the shame associated with mother and baby institutions in Ireland unfortunately mirrors the story of tens of thousands of women and children who experienced harsh conditions and mistreatment, with many fleeing to England to escape. It is right that the Irish Government opened the mother and baby institutions payment scheme for survivors of mother and baby homes in March 2024 to recognise the impact of the time they spent in those institutions. However, for those now living in England, further hurdles remain and are preventing those eligible for the scheme from accessing the compensation they are entitled to.

Survivors who accept an offer of payment from the scheme could lose a range of means-tested benefits, including housing benefit, pension credit and financial support for social care, as the payment would be treated as savings. This complicated and unfair situation has made the payments scheme, which was supposed to be a token of apology from the Irish Government, into an additional burden and hurdle for many. The uncertainty and stress involved is causing yet more trauma for survivors, and many eligible applicants have delayed accepting the money they have been offered or not made applications in the first place as a result.

Sadly, the age profile of many eligible applicants means that delays in accepting offers or making applications run the risk that many people will not live long enough to benefit from the compensation that they are due. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge in his efforts to implement Philomena's law, which would put right this unfair situation through the introduction of an indefinite capital disregard and would ringfence any compensation accepted through the scheme so that it would not impact benefits or social care calculations.

Lola McEvoy: I thank my hon. Friend for her eloquent articulation of Christina's story. Does she agree that the capital disregard functionality could be extended to future compensation schemes? Instead of each campaign group going through the trauma of trying to get an exemption for people on means-tested benefits, it could be stipulated that, when a compensation scheme is deemed to come into law, the capital disregard is automatically part of it.

Rachel Hopkins: I thank my hon. Friend for making a hugely pertinent point; I know the Minister will have heard it very well.

Although compensation for survivors will not reverse the damage and trauma inflicted, the least we can do is to ensure that those who are eligible get the payments they deserve, that the process is as easy and stress-free as possible and that we provide them with the kindness and respect that they have too often been denied.

2.48 pm

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): What a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) not just on obtaining this debate here today, but on the extremely important campaign that he has led the charge on. When we get elected as an MP we think, "What am I here for?". It is about agency, and it is about seeking justice for our communities. The community of 13,000 women across the United Kingdom deserve that justice.

I will reflect on what we have heard in the debate and the forced adoption that was inflicted on those youngsters. I was not aware that Philomena had had her son Tony for three years before being forced to give up her child.

2.50 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.3 pm

On resuming—

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): The new finish time will be 4.12 pm.

Steve Darling: Just before the Division, I was looking to talk about trauma and the significant impact that it has had on those young women's lives. We know it may have impacted them for their whole lives, and as Liberal Democrats we feel that justice must be served, and without delay. I look forward to the Minister giving some hope to those who could benefit from this system concerning how it could be put into action—hopefully in a matter of months, rather than years.

[Steve Darling]

I have an admission to make: I have never seen the film “Philomena”—probably because I would find it too upsetting, having been adopted myself. Between 1949 and 1976, 185,000 children went through a system within the UK where a culture of adoption existed around certain mother and baby units up and down England and Wales. Jon Holmes, who many of us will know from Radio 4 comedy, did a very good “File on 4” programme on the impact on those individuals, particularly the mothers. Although he was adopted, he never found his birth mother.

I was very fortunate: although I was adopted in Birmingham, my parents, Eric and Penny, who were outstanding adoptive parents, moved down to Torquay. About 15 years ago I found my birth mother, Pam, living only nine miles from Torquay. We meet regularly and have had Christmas dinner together, but it is evident how what she went through with losing me has left her with trauma and an emotional scar throughout her life. I am sure that that was also the case, if not amplified to a large extent, in the mother and baby units in Ireland, where there were significantly more state-sponsored institutions involved in the forced adoption and forced labour, and a sense of shame on individuals.

We need to see that justice is brought to bear on this situation. We need to see Philomena’s law enacted. Capital disregard was applied in relation to the 7/7 terrorist attacks and the institutional sexual abuse of children. In recent months, the same principle has been applied in respect of tainted blood; that measure has only recently gone through the Commons. I implore the Minister to ensure that we drive Philomena’s law, as a matter of urgency, and let it take flight.

3.6 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine.

I am proud to speak in this debate, secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon). I applaud his tremendous dedication in campaigning for Philomena’s law. I am also here to represent Liverpool’s Irish community and diaspora, in particular the survivors and victims of the Irish mother and baby homes scandal.

The survivors faced appalling treatment in those homes. I join colleagues in welcoming the Irish Government’s compensation scheme for survivors of the scandal. Many survivors came to England as a direct result of their experiences, either to flee their past or because they were sent overseas on leaving the homes. The *Liverpool Echo* reports that up to 40% of the 38,000 former residents eligible to apply for the compensation scheme now live in the UK. One of the survivors who came to England was Philomena Lee, after whom the law is of course named. Her father would not take her back after her time in the Abbey, so the Church sent her to work in a delinquent boys’ home in Liverpool. Philomena lived in my great city for the first two years of her time in England, before moving back. I join colleagues in welcoming Philomena’s daughter Jane and her grandson Josh, who are, as has been mentioned, in the Public Gallery today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge highlighted that, as things stand, when survivors of the scandal who live in Britain accept the compensation owed to them, they risk losing access to means-tested social security support. Some face the choice between accepting the compensation and receiving the means-tested benefits they are entitled to. The proposed Philomena’s law would address that injustice by ringfencing compensation that is accepted so that it would not affect benefits or social care calculations—stopping a further injustice. I place on record my support for the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme (Report) Bill, and I join my hon. Friend in urging the Government to take up that proposal.

I also place on record my thanks to that magnificent institution in my city, the Liverpool Irish Centre—a vital part of Liverpool’s social fabric and an institution I have enjoyed working with and visiting over a long time; I am extremely proud to frequent it on the odd occasion. I am very pleased to say that the Liverpool Irish Centre is working with Fréa to help those affected by the scandal, and I thank it for everything it does in this area.

When I first read about what happened at Irish mother and baby homes, watched the film and saw how people in power initially responded, it really resonated with me. I have also seen at first hand the playbook that is used when institutions cover up wrongdoing and hide their mistakes. For me, it was Hillsborough where, just as with the mother and baby home scandal, we saw state institutions treat working-class people with contempt, only to deceive and conceal their wrongdoing.

In this case, the institutional cover-up lasted for decades, with victims such as Philomena, who did not get the truth until her son had tragically passed away without ever knowing the love his mother had for him. The lack of accountability and justice for those victims and survivors lasted for far too long, but this is far from an isolated case. Here in Britain we also often see the pattern of state cover-ups and the refusal to accept wrongdoing and accountability. That is why we desperately need a Hillsborough law in the UK, ending the culture of cover-ups where state bodies commit acts against their own people only to try and hide them from those very people.

I conclude by reiterating the call for Philomena’s law and by calling on the Government to introduce a Hillsborough law worthy of the name, as a legacy for all those who have suffered at the hands of the state. I hope my Government are listening intently to this, because we will accept nothing less than what the victims of all state cover-ups deserve.

3.11 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): This is an absolute travesty; we have heard of this situation time and time again, with many different examples. I personally pay tribute to Philomena—my constituent—and to her daughter Jane and her grandson Josh, who are here today, for their courage in speaking about their story. I repeat my congratulations to the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) on securing this debate and on leading the charge in this House. Many organisations have been campaigning on this issue, and I hope that the Minister will deliver good news today and also convey a sense of urgency.

We can hear from the speeches in this debate the jarring gap between the profound sense of wrong that happened on the one hand and the “Computer says no” system on the other. I hope sincerely that the Government recognise that gap, come to the right conclusion and respond with urgency and with compassion. That is the very least that the affected women, their families and their descendants deserve.

3.12 pm

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. I too congratulate the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) on securing this debate and on pursuing his private Member’s Bill. It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon.

It is worth reflecting on the stories we have heard. I particularly enjoyed the account shared by the hon. Member for Luton South and South Bedfordshire (Rachel Hopkins) and it is great to see Christina in the Public Gallery. The point about the age profile for compensation was particularly poignant to hear; these are women who have lived their entire lives with that uncertainty. I was particularly interested as well in the account from the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne); I do not have the same community of Irish men and women in my constituency, so it was good to hear of the connection that he has and of the impact and role of the Irish community in his constituency.

The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) has the privilege, if that is the word, of having Philomena in her constituency—

Daisy Cooper: An honour.

Rebecca Smith: An honour—yes, I like that. It is also great to see Jane and Joshua here.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) always makes very good local connections and shares his own stories so well. This has been a really interesting debate and, although we had the break for the Division, we have been able to hear some good stories.

As the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge has rightly set out, the mother and baby institutions payment scheme was introduced by the Irish Government to compensate those who had spent time in those institutions in the Republic of Ireland. Today we have heard many of the stories of those who were impacted. Anyone who has watched the tear-jerking film “Philomena”, starring Judi Dench and Steve Coogan—unlike some hon. Members, I have been able to see it, and I admit to having cried—will be familiar with this story. It is very moving to see the impact that the backgrounds of these men and women have had on them for the rest of their lives.

As we have heard, an astonishing 35,000 single mothers gave birth in these homes throughout the 1900s. These women were ostracised and pushed into the homes so that society could forget them. The most infamous case is of Tuam house, where 802 infants tragically died over a 36-year period. Across those 18 institutions in Ireland, 9,000 children died. We are not just talking about the women. Children lost their lives as well: 15% of all the children who lived in those homes. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that that was a travesty.

It is clear that there is agreement across this House on an issue that the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge has alluded to in his private Member’s Bill. Although no amount of money can replace the loss of a child or atone for the trauma that was inflicted, these single mothers have rightly received compensation that ranges from €5,000 to €125,000, depending on their stay. The question is whether the compensation those women received should have an impact on the benefits that they are entitled to as a UK resident. There are 13,000 surviving inhabitants of those homes who moved here to start a new life free from the judgment of the Irish society that they grew up in. As of April 2025, 6,462 applications had been made, with just 11% from UK residents. That means that 700 of those applications are from UK residents, stripping these women of access to benefits that they would otherwise be entitled to. We have heard that described plainly across the Chamber in this debate.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): I associate myself with the remarks made across the Chamber about the travesty and life-changing trauma that so many women and children experienced. Does the hon. Member agree that, if Philomena’s law is applied by the UK Parliament, Northern Ireland should be included as part of the United Kingdom, given that a number of women and children will be living in Northern Ireland and encountering the same problem with benefits?

Rebecca Smith: The hon. Lady is a true champion for Northern Ireland. I cannot comment on how that would happen; the Minister is better placed to say whether that is possible. But clearly Northern Ireland is as much a part of the island of Ireland, depending on where one’s politics lie, and it would make sense to include anyone who experienced this. I am not in the position of the Minister in being able to say what might happen in the future.

In this debate we have also well-rehearsed the compensation payments for other well-known scandals: the Post Office scandal, the infected blood scandal, the compensation for victims of 7/7, and the Windrush scandal. We know the argument: those people are all eligible for full benefits and their capital is not regarded. Although I appreciate that a precedent can be set, the difference that makes this situation slightly more difficult is that the payments originate from another country. The situation is unique when compared with the others, but ultimately the precedent is clearly there.

Traditionally, the Department for Work and Pensions has opposed the step of disregarding capital payment from additional financial schemes. However, the scheme was only set in motion in 2021. Now that the dust has settled and it is clear that many are not claiming the money they are entitled to because of that lack of disregard, it will be interesting to hear whether the Department plans on changing its mind.

Although in government the Conservative party did not endorse the introduction of a capital disregard for these compensation payments, the issue was also not discussed to the same extent at that time. That is why the hon. Member for Beckenham and Penge requires our congratulations; we are three or four years into the scheme, the dust has settled, and it is clear that there are problems with people applying—we cannot get away from that fact.

[Rebecca Smith]

Under the previous Government, the Irish Government expressed that they would press other Governments to introduce dispensation for these capital payments within their welfare systems. However, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris, said in March 2024 that no such approach had been made by the Irish Government. One of the questions for the Minister is whether in his time in office such an approach has been made by the Irish Government. One could argue that the onus is on the Irish Government to provide the list of individuals likely to be impacted by this approach. With the consent of those individuals, that information could be shared with the Department for Work and Pensions so that we at least know who might be in line for that support.

More work is necessary to calculate how many people currently in receipt of welfare benefits in the UK might be impacted, because not everyone who can claim compensation falls into that bracket, and the financial pressure that a lack of dispensation places on them. What sums have been done and what are the numbers likely to be? What would the cost be if the capital payments for this scheme are disregarded when it comes to benefits?

This is an extraordinary situation, as I have already alluded to, and I agree entirely with the position. I wait to see what the Minister and the new Government decide. In 2021, the Taoiseach of Ireland, who, as we have heard, was involved in setting up this scheme, said of the report that brought it about:

“This detailed and highly painful report is a moment for us as a society to recognise a profound failure of empathy, understanding and basic humanity over a lengthy period. Its production has been possible because of the depth of courage shown by all those who shared their personal experiences with the commission. The report gives survivors what they have been denied for so long, namely, their voice, their individuality and their right to be acknowledged.”

That, for me, sums up the entire argument. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in response.

3.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship this afternoon, Ms Jardine, and to do so in a debate on such an important and emotive subject. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) for securing it. He has spoken passionately today, as have all Members who contributed, and has done so consistently in his fight to bring forward Philomena’s law. I want to say on the record what a champion he has been for that cause.

As we have heard, this was a painful, scandalous and shameful episode in Ireland’s history. It is impossible to imagine the trauma that the women and children who were sent to these institutions suffered; the heartbreaking accounts of their experiences are distressing in the extreme. What happened to them is truly appalling—all the more so because it was only in 2021 that they finally received an apology from the then Taoiseach, Micheál Martin. It is absolutely right that the victims of the scandal are at last receiving some kind of redress through the mother and baby institutions payment scheme in Ireland.

The payments can never, ever put right the terrible suffering that those women were forced to endure. No amount of compensation can make up for what they lost, but compensation for them and their family members is an important acknowledgment of the wrong that was done. Norma Foley, the Irish Government’s Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, recently highlighted how disappointed she is that not all the religious bodies involved have offered meaningful compensation. It appears that only two religious orders have contributed to the scheme in Ireland, so there is still quite some way to go to ensure that there is proper accountability and responsibility for the impact that time in these institutions had on the lives of those women and their children.

What does this scandal mean for the United Kingdom and our social security system? Due to the close historic ties between Ireland and this country, there has always been movement of people from one to the other. My constituency of Stretford and Urmston, much like that of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey), has a long history of drawing in families from Ireland, which contributed to the economic and cultural growth of the area and helped to shape the communities of today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) continued the theme highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford of the north-west’s significant Irish population and the contributions made by those Irish people to the cities of Manchester and Liverpool in particular. Other Members referenced the same thing in their communities, and the point is not lost on me. The same is true for many of the constituencies that are not represented here today, particularly urban areas where there is a significant Irish diaspora.

It is therefore not surprising that some of the people affected by this scandal are now living in the United Kingdom. The Irish Government estimate the number of applicants to the compensation scheme will be in the region of 34,000. They estimate around 40%—13,600—are living outside Ireland, with the majority assumed to be in the UK, though some will be in other countries too, particularly the United States.

However, as queried by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith), there is no way of knowing exactly how many of those affected and now living in this country are also in receipt of an income-related benefit. On the question of cost, it is simply not possible to give a firm figure or determine the implications of the change, were it to be adopted. It is even less possible to speculate on how many might, at some point in the future, claim an income-related benefit. That is an important factor.

Income-related benefits such as universal credit, housing benefit and pension credit provide a taxpayer-funded safety net for people in various circumstances and on low incomes. The nature of those benefits and the rules under which they operate are approved by Parliament. To ensure that money is directed to those most in need, rules have been developed over many years setting out not only conditions of entitlement, but how a person’s financial and personal circumstances affect the amount they receive. That means income, such as earnings or pensions as well as capital and any savings above a certain level are generally taken into account; that is the point of income-related benefits.

The more money a person already has, the less they can expect to receive from the taxpayer. However, the social security system recognises that, in certain cases, the money or capital someone has can be ignored—or, as the terminology has it, disregarded. In pension credit, for instance, there are 28 separate categories of capital that are disregarded. Examples relevant for today's debate include various compensation payments, and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge and others highlighted some examples. These disregards cover medical compensation, such as payments in respect of infected blood; payments in respect of an historic wrong, as was highlighted, including those concerning Windrush and child migrants; and payments resulting from specific events, including payments relating to Grenfell tower and the London Bombings Relief Charitable Fund.

The number of disregards has grown over time as Parliament has responded to tragic events and scandals, such as the recent Post Office scandal. We must not forget that income-related benefits are paid for through general taxation, so disregarding a compensation payment comes at a cost to the taxpayer. That is why, when deciding whether a new disregard is appropriate—unfortunately, we live in a world where tragic events and scandals happen—several factors are considered: where the event took place, who is responsible, how many people are affected, and whether it is proportionate to amend the law.

What all the examples I have given have in common is that the circumstances that gave rise to that compensation payment either occurred in this country or involved events for which the UK Government have direct responsibility or liability. The events that are the subject of this debate were a truly horrendous episode in Ireland's history. We heard multiple references to the film "Philomena," which I saw a very long time ago—not knowing what it was about, but because Judi Dench was in it. I will watch anything she is in, as I think she is amazing. As the hon. Member for South West Devon said, the film hits particularly hard as one watches it and sees what people endured.

Philomena's example, what we have heard from her and her family's Member of Parliament, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), and Christina's story, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South and South Bedfordshire (Rachel Hopkins), show just how significant an impact these events had on so many lives. It is absolutely right, therefore, that the Irish Government have taken responsibility, apologised and set up a compensation scheme to address the wrongs that occurred.

Let me address the Opposition spokesperson's intervention on the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) about those from Northern Ireland who spent time in mother and baby institutions. My understanding is that Northern Ireland is setting up its own scheme, but of course social security matters are devolved to its institutions. Whether Northern Ireland and the Republic establish a reciprocal agreement is a matter for them—such is the nature of devolution. I assure the hon. Lady that a scheme is in development.

Before securing this debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge introduced a ten-minute rule Bill, which shows how strongly and passionately he cares about this issue. I assure him that both the Minister

for pensions and the Minister for Social Security and Disability—I am sorry to disappoint everybody, but I am neither—are already carefully considering whether to legislate to disregard payment from Ireland's mother and baby institutions payment scheme.

A decision on that has not yet been made, partly because, to answer the hon. Member for South West Devon, conversations are ongoing across the Government, with Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers and officials, as well as directly with the Irish Government, about whether it is possible and how it might work. It is raised at that level frequently, because of the historical relationship between the two nations. I realise that Members will be disappointed that I am unable to confirm today whether a scheme will be put in place.

Daisy Cooper: It is not unusual in this House for Ministers to say that things are actively under consideration. In a previous Parliament, I have been in this room when Ministers have said that repeatedly. If it is under active consideration, can the Minister please say when that might conclude? Is he in a position to give us a deadline today, or is he able instead to write to every Member that has contributed to this debate within the next 14 days with a deadline?

Andrew Western: I am going to disappoint the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, because I am unable to give her that assurance today. Conversations between the UK and Irish Governments, as well as conversations between Government Departments, are ongoing. I do not want to suggest that we are leaning one way or another, or that a decision is imminent.

The hon. Member for South West Devon set out how unprecedented a decision this would be. We regularly receive requests for scandals and issues that have happened in other countries to be considered for a disregard in this country. For instance, when the coalition Government were in power, the Magdalene Laundries was one such example where a disregard was not put in place. More recently, we saw this with the Australian child abuse scandal and with Gurkhas seeking a disregard to the 28-day rule around the allocation of pension credit.

This would be a significant change with broader ramifications, but that is not to say that we are not looking to take that change forward. Thought still needs to be given to this, and conversations need to continue. I am grateful to all Members for the opportunity to set out the current conversations, and to hear directly about people's experiences.

Carla Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his response in relation to Northern Ireland, but I reiterate that the Northern Ireland Executive is just the postman for social benefits. The UK Parliament is sovereign. For something of this nature, given the small number it would impact and the small cost, I would want Northern Ireland to be part of the conversation from a UK-wide perspective, so that we go hand in hand, because constituents in Northern Ireland are as deserving as those here in GB.

Andrew Western: I do not want to openly disagree with the hon. Lady, but I gently say that social security matters are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, although of course it seeks alignment on issues wherever it is able to do so, and I welcome that. The fact that it is

[*Andrew Western*]

looking at its own scheme related to people from Northern Ireland who were in mother and baby institutions in Northern Ireland points to the flexibility within the devolved system. However, I accept the point that she makes about the importance of ensuring that, were the UK Government to apply a disregard, we would look to have conversations with the Northern Ireland Assembly about that also being applicable in its jurisdiction.

As I was saying, this debate has been an important opportunity not just to set out the Government's position, but to hear powerful testimony about Christina's story and more information about Philomena's story.

Daisy Cooper: I know that the Minister is just about to respond to the fact that we have heard powerful testimony. I understand that he is not in a position to set out any deadlines today, so I implore him to make a different commitment. Will he please commit today, in front of the many people who have joined us, to use his good offices to facilitate a meeting between our constituents who are affected by this issue and the relevant Minister, so that they can speak directly to those in power who may be in a position to make decisions in due course? Will he please commit to doing everything he can to ensure that our constituents have their voices heard by those at the top?

Andrew Western: I will happily take that request back to the Department; clearly, it is a matter for the relevant Minister. However, I can perhaps liaise with my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge, who has led this campaign, to see whether such a meeting is possible, and I will happily update all Members on whether or not we are able to convene that meeting.

As I was saying, this debate has been an important opportunity not only to set out the Government's position, but to hear powerful testimony. I am grateful to all Members who have contributed to the debate, everyone who has come along to listen and everyone who agreed to have their story told. As I have said, no decision has been made yet. We are very much listening to those who have been impacted by this issue. It would be a significant change—setting a precedent—but none the less we are keen, as I have said, to continue talks with the Irish Government and across Government before coming to a decision on this matter.

3.36 pm

Liam Conlon: I will sum up by paying tribute to the many excellent contributions this afternoon. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) spoke about the importance of film and culture in telling these stories. That was a reminder that this law is called Philomena's law, because it was Philomena's story that brought this issue to a global audience and really broke the mould by allowing people to discuss it. It lifted the cloud of secrecy and shame for so many. I offer a huge thank you to everyone involved in the film "Philomena", not least Philomena herself for her courage in telling her story.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) spoke eloquently about the role of Irish community organisations, including Irish Community Services, which is in his constituency. Again, I thank those Irish community organisations, including Irish in Britain, that are represented here today.

The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) spoke about the need for timely justice, especially given the age profile of survivors. I thank her for her support for Philomena and other survivors across Britain. In response to her question about whether we can facilitate a conversation with survivors to ensure that their voice is heard, we had an event in Parliament a couple of months ago, and it would be great to organise something similar and invite a Minister to attend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) spoke about trust in institutions more broadly, which was a point echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne). She is right that there is now significant distrust among survivors as a result of what happened to them; these homes were state sponsored, as well as being sponsored by the church. It takes an incredibly long time to repair trust, and that is why the integrity of bodies such as the survivors' advocate's office is also important, because there we have people with lived experience leading the process and the way that it is administered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Lola McEvoy) spoke about her really powerful and personal connection to this issue, and about what could be learned in the future to prevent the dither and delay that we have seen around this issue from happening to other people in the years to come.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton South and South Bedfordshire (Rachel Hopkins) shared the story of her constituent Christina Kavanagh, who is here this afternoon with us. I say to Christina, "It is a real honour to have you here." It is a reminder that we should never forget the human picture in these discussions, because when we talk about numbers, behind every single number is a real person—a life. We are doing this for you, Christina, and for many others. I also thank my hon. Friend for being such a fantastic supporter of the brilliant Irish community in Luton.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) made a really powerful contribution to the debate, with personal testimony about the long-term impact of the trauma this issue has caused families. That will continue for many years to come, both in Britain and in Ireland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby was right to draw comparisons with Hillsborough, and he spoke of his support for a Hillsborough law. There is no greater champion of the Irish in Liverpool, which is sometimes referred to as the 33rd county of Ireland due to its fantastic population. I know he is a long-standing supporter of the Liverpool Irish centre, which has done amazing work in advocating for survivors, so I thank him for his support.

The hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith) was right to comment on the scale of the institutional abuse and its impact. In this House and this country, we often talk about the number of people killed during the troubles and the impact that had. Far more people—women and children—died in those institutions than were killed throughout the entirety of the troubles, and that casts a long shadow on Ireland and on people in Britain.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) said that wherever those people are, we need justice. That should know no borders. It is really important that the devolved institutions, central Government and local authorities work together to deliver that.

I thank the Minister for his remarks, for meeting me and for starting talks with the Irish Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on this issue. It is really appreciated. He has been a fantastic champion of the Irish community in Stretford and Urmston and across Manchester. He is right to note the comments made by Minister Foley in the Irish Government. I had the pleasure of meeting her in Dublin over Easter. On a personal level, I really support the need for religious orders to step up in Ireland. The campaign has been led by our sister party in Ireland, the Irish Labour party. Importantly, Ivana Bacik, the leader of the Irish Labour party, has brought it forward to the Dáil and the Oireachtas, and I urge them to deliver justice for the victims.

I appreciate that we do not know exactly how many survivors are on means-tested benefits. I suggest that it is probably higher than for the average population, because a lot of those women were incredibly vulnerable when they came here, and a lot of them would have been incredibly isolated. A survivor told me that often the first thing that a person coming from Ireland to Britain would do was seek to join the community that they were part of in Ireland, but the women who left those institutions sought to be as far away from them as possible because of the shame that followed them. They wanted to build a new life, and in doing so they often became isolated, and they have had very difficult lives since. They were often very vulnerable at the time and remain very vulnerable today. Although we do not have a number, I expect that it will be higher than for the average population.

I appreciate that the UK Government are responsible for events, but they are also responsible for people. We are responsible for the large number of those women and children who have been living in Britain for many decades, so that should be our focus.

I thank everybody who has contributed to this debate, everyone who has come here this afternoon and everyone who has contacted me. I thank the more than 100 MPs and peers who signed an open letter on a cross-party basis in support of Philomena's law. We have had support from public figures such as Steve Coogan and, today, "Derry Girls" star Siobhán McSweeney. I really appreciate it. I know we have a long road to travel on this campaign—hopefully, not too long—but I am determined that we will do that. I will keep campaigning until we do.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the potential merits of introducing a capital disregard for payments made to UK residents under the Republic of Ireland's Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.

3.44 pm

Sitting suspended.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

4 pm

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for people with ADHD.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine, and I thank the Minister for being here for the debate.

Allow me to take Members through what ADHD diagnosis and treatment looks like in Oxfordshire. Say a 14 or 15-year-old boy is exhibiting symptoms of ADHD. They find themselves easily distracted at school. Their high energy levels are coming through in all the wrong ways; they talk noisily through class and find it hard to sit still.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this vital debate. Does he agree that one fantastic way to support young people with ADHD and their teachers is to have universal screening for neurodiverse conditions at primary school and to increase teacher training on such conditions?

Freddie van Mierlo: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic advocate for people with neurodiverse conditions and I wholeheartedly endorse his suggestion.

Imagine a young girl who works hard to mask her symptoms just to get through the day. Her GP refers her to child and adolescent mental health services, but the waiting list is so long that the service is functionally irrelevant. She knows that by the time she gets seen, she will be 18 and so kicked out of CAMHS and into adult mental health services. But since February 2024, Oxford Health's waiting list for adult assessment has been closed. It is a dead end—there is no service. For all intents and purposes, the NHS does not exist. In Oxfordshire, there were 2,385 on the waiting list in March, while capacity is 26 assessments a month. That means the waiting list is seven and a half years long. It is no wonder the list is closed and has become meaningless.

But suppose you are one of the lucky ones with a diagnosis and a treatment plan: guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence dictate that there should be an annual review of your condition. Your GP is told to continue to prescribe controlled medication, but then says they will do so only until your next annual review by a specialist. However, specialist reviews are not a commissioned service in Oxfordshire, so once someone hits this limit, their GP stops prescribing and their symptoms immediately worsen.

In July 2024, I started working on such a case—one of the first in my inbox. A constituent warned me that she was leaving CAMHS and would have no access to care. After her case was escalated to Oxford Health, it was negotiated with her GP that primary care would continue to prescribe until her next review was due. I had hoped that would buy us enough time to find a solution. In February, I was told by the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West integrated care board that it would decide on reopening waiting lists for young people aged 18 to 25 in March. That would allow reviews for that cohort to take place again.

Alex Easton (North Down) (Ind): I thank the hon. Member for securing this debate on a really big issue in Northern Ireland, where the waiting list for assessment

[Alex Easton]

is five years for children and eight years for adults. We have the added complication—I do not know whether this is the same in the rest of the UK—that schools will not accept a private diagnosis, so people are stuck. Something needs to be done for those who go down the private route so that their diagnoses are accepted at an earlier stage, rather than their having to go down the NHS route.

Freddie van Mierlo: The hon. Member makes an excellent point about the impact of going private. Far too many children—and the parents who pay—are forced into the private sector; the least we can do is make sure that that marries up properly with NHS provision.

March came and went, and only today I received a response from Dr Nick Broughton, the chief executive of the BOB ICB. He confirmed that the plan is still to fund a service for 18 to 25-year-olds, but he could commit only to a timeline of “Q3 2025”. I hope Members will forgive my scepticism about that coming to fruition. Again and again, dates for care have been pushed back, and they are contingent on everything going to plan. Luckily, my constituent is still getting the treatment she needs through the right to choose, but I understand that ICBs are going to be given the option to restrict that right—what happens then?

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): My hon. Friend is laying out many of the issues that my constituents face. He talked about his constituent using the right to choose. A number of my constituents have taken that route and got a diagnosis, but they cannot access medication because of the shared care model. That is a problem my constituent Helen raised with me—it is having a massive impact, and her ability to pay is being stretched. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government would do well to review the shared care model, so that those with an ADHD diagnosis can get the treatment they need?

Freddie van Mierlo: We absolutely need a review of how shared care works. If someone goes through a diagnosis and needs treatment for ADHD, or any other mental health or neurodivergent condition, the last thing they need is for barriers to be put in the way.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): The hon. Member is making an important speech on behalf of his constituent. He mentioned the diagnosis process; I have seen in my casework that constituents in hard-to-reach communities find it difficult to navigate the ADHD process, and some appeal to the wrong groups for advice and information. Ultimately, they end up on the waiting list for even longer, because the people they reached out to were not the right ones. Does the hon. Member agree that Government and local authorities need to work together to provide targeted information to marginalised groups and hard-to-reach communities, so that people do not fall even further behind their privileged peers?

Freddie van Mierlo: The hon. Lady makes a point about local NHS bodies working together with central Government. Where is the accountability? No one is taking responsibility for patients, and they are suffering as a result. In what world is the NHS running on its

founding principles when it comes to ADHD? The alternative to non-existent ADHD services in Oxfordshire and across the country is fully private care. This is a two-tier system baked into how we do health.

I am not naive. The healthcare professionals I have spoken to tell me that they are overwhelmed by a sudden large rise in ADHD cases.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the recent review conducted by King's College London that looked at evidence from 40 studies in 17 countries? It found no clear evidence of an increase in the prevalence of ADHD; rather, there was greater awareness and acceptance, which was likely to cause more people to seek help and diagnosis.

Freddie van Mierlo: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that increased awareness of a condition naturally leads to an increase in the number of people seeking diagnosis. I believe the same was true of left-handedness when that became less of a taboo.

I am told that seeing every person who is on a waiting list could cost as much as £3 billion to £4 billion. We must therefore find a way to target urgent, psychiatrist-led care where it is most needed, and to triage early so that the most severe cases get support, along with those who are already taking powerful medication. To that end, I welcome and commend the Government on the launch of the taskforce in March 2024. From the discussions that I have had, however, I know that the communication with ICBs has not been good enough.

The initial data from the taskforce shows that an estimated 2.5 million people in England have ADHD, with more than half a million on waiting lists. To end this farce, we need a system that is adapted to manage the new volume of patients with appropriate levels of care. It does not help to say that there is an overdiagnosis of mental health conditions, as the Health Secretary has said; rather, we need to look at models that will diagnose and treat all patients using the most appropriate tool for their level of need. A good start would be to include ADHD in the 18-week pledge on first appointments. Currently, ADHD treatment is not considered a consultant-led area, even though GPs cannot diagnose. Waiting times should be defined by ICBs, with NICE guidance.

The consequences of getting it wrong are clear. ADHD is a leading cause of school exclusions, lower academic achievement and increased drop-out rates, and 25% of the UK prison population has ADHD, with untreated symptoms often driving impulsivity and crime. Untreated ADHD is also strongly linked to substance misuse, family breakdowns and severe mental health issues.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I speak as the mother of a man who was not diagnosed with ADHD until he was 31. Fortunately for him, he has a very good employer who has made his life considerably easier than it might otherwise have been. However, I am appalled to have found out recently that great institutions such as the British Army, the RAF, the Royal Navy and the police actively discriminate against people with ADHD and simply will not employ them. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is simply outrageous? Will he join me in calling on the Minister to change that?

Freddie van Mierlo: I thank my hon. Friend for her powerful intervention and join her in that call.

For some constituents I have spoken to, it is simply a case of having access to a service that keeps their condition managed well, just as we provide for diabetes, thyroid conditions, hypertension and other chronic conditions. If we get that right, people with ADHD can get on with their lives, build families and bring in taxes for the Exchequer just like everyone else.

Before I finish, let me touch briefly on the severe ADHD medication shortage that so many Members have shown interest in. To my knowledge, the most acute need has now abated, and fortunately most of my constituents are getting the medications they need, but what plans do the Minister and the Government have so that it does not happen again? I look forward to the Minister's response.

4.11 pm

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine.

I thank the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) for securing this important debate on support for people with ADHD, and for sharing the experiences of his constituents in Oxfordshire. I know that the hon. Gentleman and others wrote to the Minister for Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberafan Maesteg (Stephen Kinnock) about many of the issues he raised today; I hope he found the Department's response to that letter useful. I thank other colleagues for their interventions. These issues also affect my own constituents, and I see them in my inbox, so I understand their impact on families and communities.

First, we must be honest about the challenges. The Government inherited a broken NHS with too many patients facing long waits to access services, including ADHD assessments and support. Lord Darzi's report laid bare that the growth in demand for ADHD assessments nationally has been so significant in recent years that it risks completely overwhelming the scarce resources available. The report also shows that, at current rates, it would take on average eight years to clear the backlog of adult ADHD assessments and that for many trusts the backlog would not be cleared for decades. We absolutely recognise the need to better understand the factors behind the rise in demand for services to ensure that we offer the right support.

The hon. Member for Henley and Thame asked why his trust has closed its waiting list. In preparing for the debate, I asked officials to give me a clearer understanding of what is happening in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB, which saw a near 50% increase in referrals year on year between 2019 and 2024. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has had contact with the chief executive. The trust felt that it could not cope with that level of demand because it viewed it as an unmanageable risk to patient safety and staff wellbeing. That is why it made the difficult decision to close the waiting list for new adult ADHD assessments in February last year. That was the trust's decision.

As someone who worked in the system over the peak years of austerity—some people may remember them—I completely understand how trusts are often confronted with such decisions. The recent growth in demand seems quite exceptional. Integrated care boards are responsible

for commissioning services in line with the health and care needs of the people they serve. It is up to local decision makers to make tough choices, because they know the situation on the ground better than Ministers in Whitehall.

I understand that the ICB has established an ADHD programme steering group to stabilise its services, and it is working with local partners, including people with lived experience, to develop a new service model aimed at addressing health inequalities, providing a single-service model across the ICB, with a single provider, and providing support for people who do not benefit from medication. I understand that the trust is working to open a service for 18 to 25-year-olds as an interim measure to help those who transition from children and young people's services to adult services, which we know is a difficult time in their lives. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will maintain a close watch on those commitments.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Following on from the intervention by the hon. Member for North Down (Alex Easton), I know that this is a devolved matter, but the issues are exactly the same in Northern Ireland as in GB, with long waiting lists and a lack of access to services. Does the Minister agree that people with ADHD are being discriminated against right across the United Kingdom because of the lack of access to services? Does she also agree that, in the interim, those who go for a private diagnosis should be able to enter into a shared care arrangement so that they can access the medication that assists them to function day to day, live normal lives and be part of our society?

Karin Smyth: I will come on to shared care agreements. As the hon. Member says, this is a devolved matter, and I am focusing on support for issues facing ADHD services in England and what we are doing to support trusts to get back on top of waiting lists and improve access to services.

First, NHS England has commissioned an independent ADHD taskforce, which is working to bring together those with lived experience and experts from the NHS, education, charity and justice sectors. The taskforce is developing a better understanding of the challenges affecting those with ADHD, including timely and equal access to services and support. I can confirm today—I know that this will be of interest to many hon. Members—that the taskforce will publish its interim findings shortly, with a final report expected after the summer recess. The interim report will helpfully focus on recommendations that support a needs-based approach, beyond just the health system, in which people can access support based on their needs, not their diagnosis. The report will also set out recommendations for support to be provided beyond medication, and by healthcare professionals other than specialists.

Secondly, NHS England recently published an ADHD data improvement plan to inform future service planning, and on 29 May it published management data on ADHD waiting lists. Thirdly, it has been capturing examples from ICBs that are trialling innovative ways of delivering ADHD services and using that information to support systems to tackle waiting lists and provide support.

Fourthly, as part of the Government's five long-term missions, we have launched the 10-year plan to deliver the three big shifts that our NHS needs to be fit for the

[Karin Smyth]

future: from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. All those shifts are relevant to supporting people in all parts of the country with a range of conditions such as ADHD.

Fifthly, we are supporting innovation. Earlier this year, at a parliamentary event, many of us will have met innovators who are supported by NHS partners. I heard about the QbTest technology that complements the knowledge and skills of clinicians as part of the ADHD assessment process. I understand that 70% of NHS children's ADHD services already use that technology, and the evidence suggests that it has a positive impact in making the assessment process swifter and simpler.

Freddie van Mierlo: Will the Minister comment on the fact that in Oxfordshire there is no commissioned service for the specialist reviews that NICE requires annually as a condition of being on the powerful medication? How can it be that someone can be started on medication but have no route to continue on it because they cannot get their annual review?

Karin Smyth: I am not aware of the detail of the pathway in the hon. Member's ICB. I suggest that that is a matter for him to discuss with the ICB, which will have heard his question about how it is delivering those services on the ground.

Members raised issues around shared care agreements and the difficulties that people with ADHD are experiencing in accessing medication through such agreements, particularly when they have received a diagnosis through a private provider. It is the responsibility of secondary care specialists such as consultants, rather than GPs, to initiate treatment of ADHD. However, sometimes a shared care agreement, in which the GP takes over monthly prescriptions and routine monitoring once the patient is happy with their medication and dosage, can be put in place. The General Medical Council, which regulates and sets standards for doctors in the UK, has issued guidance to help GPs decide whether to accept shared care responsibilities for any condition. NHS clinicians need to be content that any prescriptions or referrals for treatment for any condition are clinically appropriate. All shared care arrangements are voluntary, so even where arrangements are in place, practices can decline shared care requests on clinical or capacity grounds.

If I may, Ms Jardine, I will take the opportunity to update the House on the supply of medicines, which has also been raised by colleagues; I understand that it was raised at business questions recently, too. The Government recognise the difficulties that some people have experienced with accessing ADHD medication due to medicine supplies. We know how worrying and frustrating those shortages are for patients and families. I am pleased to say that we have resolved many of the outstanding issues affecting the supply of lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine capsules, atomoxetine oral solution and

guanfacine prolonged release tablets. However, some specific manufacturers continue to have issues with methylphenidate.

We continue to work with manufacturers to resolve remaining issues. In fact, I met the medicine supply team this morning, as I do very regularly, to make sure we are on top of these issues as much as we can be. The team is working hard to make sure that the situation improves. Where issues remain, we are directing suppliers to secure additional stocks, expedite deliveries where possible, and review plans to support continued growth in demand for the short and long term. We have worked with specialist clinicians during this time to provide comprehensive guidance to healthcare professionals where there is a disruption to supply. We keep the Specialist Pharmacy Service website up to date with the latest availability of ADHD medicines. I commend it to people listening to the debate and to hon. Members. It also provides comprehensive guidance on switching to alternative treatments, supporting clinicians to make informed choices with their patients.

I can assure colleagues that, as the Minister responsible for medicine supply, I will instruct officials to keep a close eye on this issue, so we do not see any of the progress we have made undone. I plan to hold an event, hopefully in Parliament and possibly in the autumn, to keep updating hon. Members on this issue, because I know it is one that concerns us all.

In closing, I want to address the young people who may be watching or tuning into the debate at home. I know it is tough for many neurodivergent kids today. You might be stuck on a waiting list, suffering at school or struggling to find your medicine. We really do care about this. We are trying to get to grips with some of the problems we found when we came into office, and I hope you will start to feel that progress within the next few years.

Rachel Gilmour: May I bring the Minister back to the subject of my earlier intervention? Will she, as a matter of urgency, take it up with the Home Secretary and get a decision? We should not discriminate against people with ADHD by preventing them from joining the services, whether it be the police, the Army, the Royal Navy or the RAF. I am so shocked about this I am like a dog with a bone—I cannot let it go.

Karin Smyth: I will ensure that the hon. Lady gets a reply on that issue.

I thank the hon. Member for Henley and Thame for securing this important debate and for giving me the chance to put on the record some of the issues the Government are addressing. The Government know there is much more to be done to get better access to timely diagnosis and support for all our constituents, but I hope the actions I have set out today provide some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman and other colleagues.

Question put and agreed to.

4.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

Mass Transit: West Yorkshire

4.29 pm

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for mass transit in West Yorkshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. Last week, I was delighted to have secured this debate, and the confirmation of its date came through just an hour before the news that the Government will indeed be investing £2.1 billion in West Yorkshire's public transport, including more than £1 billion for a new tram in Leeds and Bradford, so I am now even happier to have secured it and to be leading it.

I will start with the background to that decision and explain why it is such a huge moment for my home city, Leeds, and for our home region of West Yorkshire. Leeds is currently the largest city in Europe without a mass transit system—that is such a well-known fact that if I had been given £1 every time I heard it, I could have personally financed the mass transit system 10 years ago, with spare change for a space programme—but transport aficionados and Members from my part of the world will know that that was not always the case. Leeds had a horse-drawn tram as early as 1871, and at its peak the network—which did not have horses by that time—had 476 trams and 124 miles of track. But while the horses did not leave us completely, the trams did. What had once been one of the largest urban transport systems in the UK was finally closed down, and in 1959 we saw the end of our tram system.

Leeds was often referred to as the “motorway city of the seventies”—I think that even appeared on a stamp—because we became entirely reliant on the car, which has held us back in some respects. There is only so much traffic that can be added to our roads before they have to be expanded, with new lanes added and traffic systems rethought—and often only for temporary benefit, before the next solution has to be considered. To their credit, policymakers and politicians figured that out—it is not something that we have just come to ourselves.

Trams can carry approximately four times as many passengers as a typical bus, and they massively increase the transport capacity of any region. They are versatile and can run alongside road networks where needed, because they can be segregated from traffic to avoid congestion and improve journey times for passengers. Trams are also very consistent. That is why politicians have tried multiple times, without success, to bring mass transit back to Leeds.

We have had everything: plans for trams; a trolleybus scheme; an elevated railway that was not dissimilar to the monorail in an episode of “The Simpsons”; and even, if we care to go back far enough, an underground proposal. That has left some people in my city highly sceptical of the announcement last week, because we have been burned too many times.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward this welcome debate. I spoke to him earlier, and I know that this has been a passion of his since before he became an MP. I am pleased to see the Minister in her place, and I am sure she will not let him down when she replies—no pressure, Minister! Does the hon. Gentleman agree that these

transportation routes and hubs, which residents in London take for granted, take decades to build, but without sustained investment they are simply dreams? Does he also agree that Government and the Minister need to commit substantially to projects and give a small slice of the Budget to achieving them without onerous conditions?

Mark Swards: I thank the hon. Member for his incredibly timely contribution—I could not agree more.

One reason that some residents of Leeds were sceptical last week was the repeated failures of previous Governments of different colours to deliver the transport improvements that we know we deserve. I am here to say that this time it is different. The money for the tram system has been committed and announced by the Government, in conjunction with the combined authority. The obstacles have been removed, and I will spend the rest of my time as the Member of Parliament for Leeds South West and Morley ensuring that the system is actually built.

The system will provide the boost that Leeds needs to compete with other major cities in the UK that already have their mass transit systems in place—but we have some things that they do not. As well as a newly promoted Premier League team, we can already boast the largest financial and professional service sectors outside London and the highest rate of growing businesses outside the capital, depending on how that rate is measured. The mass transit system will help us to supercharge these sectors, and more, once it is finally completed.

The funding provided by the Government allows for construction of phase 1 of this scheme—I will give just a bit of information on phase 1 for those who are not familiar with it. It provides two main tram lines. We have the Bradford line, which connects Leeds city centre to Bradford city centre, with an option to connect through Wortley too. I am very much advocating for that option, since Wortley is in my constituency—and not just because there would be a stop right next to my house.

The second line is the Leeds line, which has the potential to connect our hospitals, Leeds railway station, Elland Road stadium and the White Rose shopping centre to each other. I am also very excited about the White Rose stop, which is the confirmed stop for that line; although the rest of the stops are out for consultation, all lines finish at the White Rose. The shopping centre is in my constituency, and I spent much of my early life there, working there throughout my A-levels and university, so I know what it will mean for jobs in my constituency and what it will mean for the communities I represent if we are able to link them up under this unified transport system with the tram in the White Rose centre. It is a really important move for our region and for my constituency.

While I do not want to get too far ahead of myself, I am very hopeful for phase 2 of the plans. Phase 2 should connect more locations in our region directly to the network, allowing many more constituencies to feel the full benefits of a mass transit system on their doorstep. It is clearly important that not only Leeds and Bradford, but the whole of west Yorkshire should benefit from these plans.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire, I am determined to find solutions for growth in our region, and so is

[Mark Sowards]

every member of the APPG. Mass transit is key to achieving that, and it has certainly been popular among residents and businesses in west Yorkshire. The combined authority spent a bit of time last year speaking with individuals and businesses across our region—5,000 in total. Two thirds of those they surveyed backed the Bradford line and three quarters backed the Leeds line—so mass transit is extremely welcome. The two lines will improve transport for nearly 675,000 people.

All this would not have been possible without the tireless work and commitment of Tracy Brabin, the Mayor of West Yorkshire. Tracy has been the strongest advocate for mass transit in our region ever since she took office. It formed a key part of her manifesto last year and now she is delivering on that promise. Her fierce desire to grow our local economy and to build infrastructure that benefits everyone in west Yorkshire is an inspiration. Her efforts mean that we can take advantage of devolution in full. The transport scheme is part of the local growth plan and will see the creation of about 33,000 new jobs, new homes and about £26 billion of extra growth in our region over the next decade.

I must also make a commitment to the Weaver network, because our brand-new franchised and integrated transport system is key to that network. It would be remiss of me not to state how pleased I am that all our buses are being brought back into public control under one banner from 2027 onwards. Although the tram will bring the huge benefits that I have already spoken about, our buses are just as important. In my constituency, the Ardsley and Robin Hood ward is very poorly served by the current bus arrangements. I will work with Tracy Brabin to change that, because, sadly, it is not just true for Ardsley and Robin Hood, but for many routes and networks across my constituency. The Weaver network will connect that franchise bus network with our trams and our train services, as well as linking up with active travel routes. It is the unified transport system that our region deserves.

Before I conclude, I thank all my colleagues who have contributed to the campaign to secure a tram network for west Yorkshire. I also thank my constituency neighbour, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West and Pudsey (Rachel Reeves). Her support for this project has been consistent and it has been incredibly welcome.

We know that this investment is a vote of confidence in west Yorkshire. It is a vote of confidence from the Government; they know how much we have to offer and how much potential our region has. It is just the start of our plans to unlock our region's potential.

I have some questions for the Minister to consider. Can the Government confirm that the funding provided to the combined authority will be flexible and will allow phase 1 to be built in full? How will they work with the combined authority to train and recruit the skilled workers needed to deliver this infrastructure? What is their latest assessment of the economic benefits that the project will bring to West Yorkshire? How do they envisage working alongside the combined authority to take advantage of the opportunities created by our mass transit system once it is completed? Are they as optimistic as I am that the case for any second phase of the project will be even stronger once the impacts from

the first phase are felt? I will be very grateful if the Minister takes those questions into account when she delivers her closing remarks.

I put on the record my thanks and appreciation to all those who share our region's ambition, and everyone who has supported this project. It gives me great pleasure to say that we will have spades in the ground for the tram in 2028, and that finally—finally—it is time for trams in West Yorkshire.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called in the debate.

4.41 pm

Katie White (Leeds North West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds South West and Morley (Mark Sowards) for securing this important and timely debate. After years of waiting, we are finally getting a mass transit network worthy of a great world city, thanks to the Government's support for West Yorkshire transport and the tireless efforts of our Labour Mayor, Tracy Brabin. This investment must benefit everyone, including my constituents in Leeds North West. Let us make sure there are no delays in moving from phase 1 to phase 2, establishing strong connections across our region.

Leeds Bradford airport is welcoming thousands of travellers this summer with a new terminal, offering a more comfortable start to their holidays, but it remains poorly served by public transport and has no proper rail link to the city centre and communities. As we embrace mass transit, we must seize the opportunities to connect the airport to the network, ensuring that the Weaver network is ready for take-off with no delays.

Beyond those large-scale projects, our communities need reliable, affordable bus services, as my hon. Friend said. Towns and villages such as Otley and Pool-in-Wharfedale deserve fast, frequent connections, and those heading to Horsforth—recently and rightly voted one of the best places to live in the UK—should not have to rely on taxis for a night out. That is why I support the moves by the Government and the combined authority to bring our buses back into public ownership, and I will back national and local efforts to make that happen.

4.42 pm

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds South West and Morley (Mark Sowards) on securing this debate on such an important topic.

The recent announcement of local transport investment marks a significant milestone for West Yorkshire—particularly the long-awaited mass transit system, which will finally bring trams back to the region. The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for a mass transit network across Leeds and West Yorkshire; as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, Leeds is the largest city in western Europe without one, so the funding is very welcome.

Transport challenges do not stop at city boundaries, however. People's lives span towns, villages and rural areas, and so must the solutions. We need a truly Yorkshire-wide approach that encourages cross-boundary collaboration, unlocks regional growth and serves all communities, not just urban cores. In that spirit, I want to focus on the fantastic work of Liberal Democrat councillors across West Yorkshire, who have been campaigning tirelessly on public transport issues over a number of years.

To wind the clock back a bit, I was at one point a West Yorkshire Liberal Democrat councillor. Interestingly, at that point in time, my council ward was wrapped around on three sides by North Yorkshire. I was raised in West Yorkshire, but educated at Selby college, so I know all too well the issues with cross-boundary transit. Therefore, while the Liberal Democrats and I welcome this new funding, a proper Yorkshire-wide approach is key to ensuring that infrastructure does not end at those arbitrary lines.

Let us look around West Yorkshire: councillors on the ground in Bradford, including Jeanette Sunderland, have been campaigning for over a decade to improve bus connections to Apperley Bridge rail station—a vital link that is still missing for over 15,000 homes. Without it, many are cut off from easy rail access, limiting opportunities for work and education. Councillor Brendan Stubbs has rightly been calling for urgent action to secure funding for a new Bradford bus station. The current station, as we know, is crumbling and unsafe, and new facilities must integrate effectively with the proposed tram network to serve Bradford's future needs.

In Kirklees, local councillors John Lawson and Baroness Pinnock have raised concerns about the Dewsbury-Cleckheaton bus lane proposals. Objections are focused mainly on safety risks, disruption from construction and potential congestion. Many argue that simpler, lower-cost measures, such as improved traffic light control and enhanced bus reliability, would provide better value for money and cause less disruption.

Turning to the White Rose shopping centre that the hon. Member for Leeds South West and Morley mentioned, I think it is good that announcements have been made for phase 1. My concern is that the work on the train station there was already under way, but it was paused after it went over budget of the £26 million originally anticipated. If we are being honest, there has been a bit of a face-saving exercise put on by the combined authority.

Mark Swards: I appreciate that time is short. We are making good progress on getting the paused White Rose train station, based on Churwell Hill, restarted. I have been working very closely with the combined authority to ensure that that station is built, and I am pleased to say it will be soon.

Tom Gordon: I commend the hon. Gentleman for his campaigning on that issue, but I return to the point that we need a comprehensive integrated transport network that links up everything. What we have seen previously is a piecemeal approach that has not necessarily thought through how we would go about something like this. While it is welcome that it is on the way to being resolved, it is a damning indictment of the situation up until now.

The funding announced is exactly the same as that announced under the previous Conservative Government

—to the penny, so I question whether it is new funding or just a repackaging and reallocation of existing funding. I am sure the Conservative spokesperson, the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew), will pick up on that point; he almost certainly will.

Turning to the work of the combined authority and the West Yorkshire Mayor: back when I was a councillor in Wakefield, we voted on the agreement to enter that authority. In that consultation, the only local authority in West Yorkshire that did not want to enter a combined authority or have a regional mayor was Wakefield, principally because it had previously been asked if it wanted a mayor and had voted against it. There were also concerns about powers being sucked up from local authorities to a new combined authority.

Speaking to local councillors across the piece, there is still scepticism about whether that is happening or whether the resulting transport decisions have been in the interests of everyone in all corners of West Yorkshire. The new mayor promised to fix the buses in her first term and she ran her re-election campaign based on that, so I think there are questions to be answered there.

When we look further afield, we have issues with rail links out of Leeds into other places across county boundaries, such as Harrogate and Knaresborough, with that link between Harrogate and York. While it is welcome that funding has been announced for West Yorkshire, we did not get a single penny for North Yorkshire under the Labour mayor, David Skaith.

Rounding up in the interests of time, we want to see a properly integrated transport plan with proper funding—a Transport for Yorkshire approach to make sure that no one is left behind.

4.48 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): It is very good to see you in the Chair, Ms Jardine. As everyone else has done, I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds South West and Morley (Mark Swards) on securing this debate.

West Yorkshire and the city of Leeds have long been underserved by transport connections; that is common ground across this Chamber. Research from the Centre for Cities in 2022 found that just 38% of the population can reach the city centre within 30 minutes by public transport. That is a very low percentage for a city the size of Leeds.

As the former Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities made clear in his 2024 policy paper, that leads to below-average productivity in the area, and a critical catalyst for improvement must be better transport connections. The hon. Member for Leeds South West and Morley was also right to allude to a long history of promises, half promises, schemes and plans to improve transport in Leeds, going back many decades. He was generous enough to say that it was a failure of Governments of multiple different colours.

I will go back just to the 2000s, when there was the supertram proposal, which the hon. Member might remember. It was a 17-mile system with 50 stations, but it was cancelled by Alistair Darling in 2005 because of cost overruns. In the interests of time, I will not read out the juicy quote from the leader of Leeds Council, but I am sure the hon. Member is familiar with it.

[Jerome Mayhew]

In 2007, that proposal was replaced by the bus rapid transport scheme with FTR. That had some of the benefits of the supertram, but with lower initial capital costs, and it was replaced in 2012 by Wright StreetCars. Also in 2012, the trolleybus network proposal was approved by the Government. The scheme was allocated £173 million of public money to be in operation by 2018. From memory, it involved two park and rides and a bus system into the city centre. That, in its turn, was dropped in 2016—again, because of cost overruns and delays.

Then we jump forward to 2021, to the West Midlands combined authority and the mass transit scheme with light rail and tram-trains, or bus rapid transport. I am pleased to say that in 2023, it was given the go-ahead by the Conservative Government of the time, and £2.5 billion was allocated for the mass transit system, funded in full for Leeds and West Yorkshire by the Secretary of State's predecessor Mark Harper. That was a firm commitment supported by the Treasury at the time.

On last week's announcement by the Chancellor of £2.1 billion for the West Yorkshire mass transit scheme, I can see how the constituents of the hon. Member for Leeds South West and Morley might feel a little sceptical—they have been burned more than once. The plan now is to get the spades in the ground in 2028. It is almost as good as the previous Conservative Government's plan, which was to get spades in the ground in 2027. The number is remarkably similar to what was then Network North policy.

It is worth looking at the numbers. In 2023, it was announced that £2.115 billion would be allocated, so it was a bit of a surprise that last week it was £2.1 billion. The Chancellor has knocked off 15 million quid, but it is absolutely a re-announcement of existing policy.

Katie White: Does the hon. Member agree that although those announcements were made, like many other announcements, such as those on hospitals, they were never funded, and so the Treasury never allocated the money to them. He is right that there was a similar intention, but we are fulfilling on the delivery of that intention.

Jerome Mayhew: The answer is that this is spending from 2026 to 2031, so of course we do not have the allocation in 2023. We will have it in 2026, however, and it is part of the Government funding process. If the hon. Lady asks me where that money is coming from, it is from the savings made through the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2. In rail terms, that was £19.6 billion.

Tom Gordon: On that point, I had an interesting interaction with the Secretary of State for Transport. I asked her about the reallocation of that HS2 money, and she referred to it as “fantasy money”. What does the hon. Gentleman say to the point that it is a reallocation of money that the Secretary of State says did not exist?

Jerome Mayhew: That is an interesting point. If it is fantasy money, this is a fantasy announcement from last week. I suspect that the Treasury has realised that it is not fantasy money. It is the scheduling of capital expenditure in five-year periods, a bit like we have with

road networks and the road investment strategy. In the RIS system we have a five-year forward allocation of resources, and this is just the same, so there is a little political sleight of hand here.

A report by Steer suggests that a light rail vehicle with a capacity of 200 operating every three minutes can carry up to 4,000 people per hour in each direction. That is equivalent to about 50 fully laden buses. The aim now is to get it up and running in the mid-2030s. But if the past is any guide, the biggest risk to the project is delay and cost overruns. With that in mind, I ask the Minister these questions. What steps is she taking to ensure that costs are contained and deadlines do not slip? Has the West Yorkshire combined authority set out a timeline for the environmental and technical work to enable the development to proceed on time? Can she outline what discussions she has had with the mayor to ensure that upgrades to heavy rail infrastructure, such as the trans-Pennine route upgrade, are fully integrated? Can she provide assurances that tomorrow's transport budget will not see cuts in other areas? Will this scheme actually be delivered? We shall wait and see. I certainly wish it well, but I understand why the residents of West Yorkshire feel sceptical.

4.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds South West and Morley (Mark Sewards) on securing this timely debate and on his passionate words in support of his city and region.

I welcome the opportunity to speak about the Government's support for West Yorkshire's ambitions and why we are committed to working hand in hand with local leaders to deliver transformational change. West Yorkshire is a region with enormous potential. Home to 2.4 million people and a £67 billion economy, it contains some of the fastest growing towns and cities in the country. However, it also faces significant socioeconomic challenges. Productivity has lagged behind the national average for 15 years. Too many people still live in areas of persistent deprivation, and poor connectivity is holding back housing, regeneration and access to opportunities. Around one in five people in West Yorkshire live in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.

Improving transport connectivity is key to unlocking growth across West Yorkshire. Better links between Leeds and Bradford—just 9 miles apart—will help to reduce reliance on car travel, which currently accounts for 74% of journeys.

Tom Gordon: Will the Minister give way?

Lilian Greenwood: I am very conscious of time, and I want to make a bit more progress.

Leeds remains the largest city in western Europe without a mass transit system. For a city of its scale, potential and ambition, that is unsustainable. That is why Government intervention is vital and why we are already acting. We recognise the long-standing aspirations of local leaders and communities to build a modern, integrated mass transit network. Those ambitions, as we have heard, stretch back years, but setbacks have not

weakened the determination, and I commend Mayor Tracy Brabin and the West Yorkshire combined authority for their persistence and vision.

The Government have backed the ambitions with real support and real money: £200 million has already been provided in development funding, to enable the combined authority to progress its plans. That includes a £160 million allocation from the first city region sustainable transport settlement. Now, I am pleased to confirm that the support is growing under the new funding settlement announced last week. As a Government, we have made a £15.6 billion commitment to improving local transport across the north and the midlands, to be delivered through transport for city regions settlements. Between 2027 and 2032, West Yorkshire will receive an impressive £2.1 billion—a strong vote of confidence in the region's plans.

It is right that prioritising use of the funding will be for West Yorkshire to decide on, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Katie White) will be making the case for improved transport connectivity, including to Leeds Bradford airport. We are bringing £30 million of transport for city regions funding forward into the next two financial years, to support early preparation and delivery of schemes. Most importantly, the combined authority has confirmed that this funding will enable the delivery of phase 1 of West Yorkshire mass transit, connecting Bradford and Leeds city centres, to begin. Mayor Tracy Brabin is keen to have spades in the ground from 2028. Of course, the period beyond 2032 is for a future spending review. Beyond mass transit, TCR funding will also support a new bus station in Wakefield to replace the existing facility, and a modern bus station replacement for Bradford interchange, expanding services and improving reliability across the region.

Our support extends beyond finance. With West Yorkshire combined authority, we have put in place a new model for working together. It features a joint sponsor board and close collaboration between Government officials and the combined authority. We are working side by side to progress at pace, align with national priorities and support delivery, so hopefully there will not be the kinds of hold-up that we have seen in the past.

The prize and the benefits of mass transit to West Yorkshire are clear. It will improve local transport for over 675,000 people, many of whom are from communities currently disconnected from opportunity. It will reduce congestion, cut carbon emissions and enable access to jobs, education and services, especially for those who do not have a car. It will support transformational regeneration,

housing and growth, particularly in areas such as central Bradford that have previously been overlooked for major investment.

The scheme complements wider regional transport reforms, including rail upgrades and bus franchising. We welcome the introduction of the Weaver network, which will mean a single brand across the transport network in West Yorkshire and will make transport easier and more accessible for passengers. Together, those efforts will build a modern, integrated public transport system worthy of this growing city region, which is central to the growth ambitions of the Government and the country.

Looking ahead, we will continue close collaboration with the combined authority to move from planning to delivery. Key milestones include submission of the strategic outline business case for approval in 2026, when many of the questions that have been posed in the debate will be explored and fulfilled; route consultations; and the development of a growth prospectus to maximise the economic benefits of mass transit in West Yorkshire. That will include an employment and skills action plan to train and recruit the skilled workers needed to deliver the programme. Our shared ambition is to see spades in the ground in 2028, and I assure Members that the Department is fully committed to enabling that ambitious timeline.

The Government back West Yorkshire's mass transit ambitions because better transport means better lives, safer journeys, cleaner air, more opportunities and stronger communities. I once again congratulate my hon. Friends on their support and advocacy for this absolutely vital investment. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel) nodding along with that. The West Yorkshire region has huge potential, and this Government will give it our backing into the future.

5.1 pm

Mark Swards: The Opposition spokespeople, the hon. Members for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon) and for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew) tempted me to make interventions, but I resisted then and I will resist now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for mass transit in West Yorkshire.

5.2 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 10 June 2025

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS Cervical Screening Programme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton): I would like to inform the House that I have accepted the UK National Screening Committee's recommendation to further risk stratify the cervical screening programme in England. This increases the opportunities to test and recall women and people with a cervix who have human papillomavirus (HPV) while extending the cervical screening intervals from three to five years in England for individuals who have a negative HPV test. This will bring England's cervical screening intervals in line with those of Wales and Scotland.

The NHS cervical screening programme in England provides all women between the ages of 25 and 64 with the opportunity to be screened routinely to detect HPV infection or cervical abnormalities at an early, more treatable stage. The aim of the programme is to reduce the number of women who develop invasive cervical cancer and reduce the number who die from it.

Cervical screening does not test for cancer; it is a step before which helps to detect the risk of developing cervical cancer. This is because since December 2019, the primary screen in the NHS cervical screening programme has been a test to detect high-risk HPV which causes nearly all cervical cancers. A negative screen for HPV means that the chances of developing a cancer within five years are very small, as it can take around 10 years or more from the time HPV is detected to developing cervical cancer.

Those who test positive for HPV are already being followed up with yearly testing. This is important to ensure that individuals are monitored for any early signs of cervical abnormalities and provided the necessary treatment.

Because HPV testing is a more accurate and highly sensitive screening test, which detects the risk of developing cervical cancer before it develops, we are able to screen people based on their individual risk rather than just their age. This means reducing how often people who are HPV negative are screened, while concentrating efforts on more frequent screening for those that need it. This is a positive step as women do not have to undergo unnecessary testing and the associated anxiety that can be experienced.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the UK National Screening Committee for continuing to provide invaluable expert advice on the introduction of new screening programmes and modifications to existing ones, and especially on achieving the right balance between benefit and harms.

I would also like to pay tribute to and thank all those who work to deliver high quality and safe screening across the country.

[HCWS691]

TRANSPORT

Automated Vehicles Act 2024: Implementation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): I wish to provide the House with an update on steps the Government are taking to implement the Automated Vehicles Act 2024 and kick-start economic growth, a top priority in the Government's plan for change. The AV Act delivers one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks of its kind anywhere in the world, with safety at its core, which will give potential operators, tech developers and manufacturers the confidence to invest in the UK. It sets out clear legal responsibilities so businesses know where they stand, establishes a safety framework and creates the necessary regulatory powers. The AV Act implementation programme has been designed to maximise innovation, enabling investors and operators to develop and deploy the creative mobility solutions that can drive growth. This comes as part of a Government-wide programme of work using artificial intelligence to deliver the plan for change, with AVs being a clear example of how AI will bring tangible benefits to the public.

Automated passenger services

Today I can announce that the Government will accelerate the introduction of automated passenger services regulations, subject to the outcome of a consultation later this summer. This will provide businesses with the regulatory confidence to invest in testing and deploying these innovative services on our streets, reinforcing the UK's position among the world leaders in tech deployment. It will help facilitate commercial pilots of services with paying passengers and no safety driver to be deployed from spring 2026.

The APS permitting regime was created to address the complexities of applying current taxi, private hire vehicle and public service vehicle legislation to passenger services that would operate without a driver.

Protecting marketing terms for AVs

Today, I launched a consultation, and an accompanying draft statutory instrument, on protecting marketing terms for AVs; the consultation will run for 12 weeks. The AV Act sets out an authorisation process to determine whether a vehicle can safely drive itself without being controlled or monitored by a human. We want to support the innovators and businesses that are building genuinely groundbreaking tech by protecting certain terms, so that they can only be used to describe authorised self-driving vehicles, boosting investor confidence, consumer trust and driver certainty.

This consultation aims to identify the words, expressions, symbols or marks that should be used to describe only authorised AVs. The Government expect to bring forward secondary legislation following careful consideration of consultation responses. Our aim is for these regulations to come into effect in early 2026; they will be subject to the negative procedure.

Statement of safety principles for AVs

Today, I have published a call for evidence on the statement of safety principles, which will consider the safety outcomes that should be sought by self-driving vehicles; the call for evidence will also run for 12 weeks.

Public confidence in the safety of these vehicles will be essential to take advantage of the huge economic opportunities they will present. The Department for Transport's monitoring and annual reporting will consider performance against these principles. The AV Act specifies that the safety principles must be framed with a view to ensuring that authorised AVs achieve a safety level equal to or higher than careful and competent human drivers, and that road safety in Great Britain will improve due to the presence of these vehicles.

I intend to publish a further consultation on the statutory principles in the coming months that will be informed by stakeholder feedback from this call for evidence. The final statutory guidance will be laid in Parliament and will be subject to parliamentary approval.

Transport AI action plan

The announcements made today are a cornerstone of the Department's new transport AI action plan. This publication is a 23-point plan that sets out how the Government are using AI to improve transport for everyone in the UK. The plan builds upon the transport data strategy and the AI opportunities action plan to align the transport sector with the broader AI agenda, drive economic growth and deliver on the plan for change.

A copy of these publications and associated annexes will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS692]

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**not later than
Tuesday 17 June 2025**

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