

Vol. 799
No. 352



Tuesday
8 October 2019

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Questions	
Falkland Islands: Landmines.....	1991
Sale of Knives	1994
Museums and Galleries: Financial Sustainability.....	1996
Visa Applications: Dr Mu-Chun Chiang.....	1998
Road Closures in Central London	
<i>Private Notice Question</i>	2000
Sir Richard Henriques Report	
<i>Private Notice Question</i>	2003
Brexit: Preparations	
<i>Statement</i>	2006
Syria: Withdrawal of US Troops	
<i>Statement</i>	2022
Customs Legislation and Amendments: Impact Analysis	
<i>Statement</i>	2025
Rural Economy (Rural Economy Committee Report)	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	2027
Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill [HL]	
<i>Returned from the Commons</i>	2072
Royal Commission	2072
Royal Assent.....	2074
Prorogation: Her Majesty's Speech.....	2074

Lords wishing to be supplied with these Daily Reports should give notice to this effect to the Printed Paper Office.

No proofs of Daily Reports are provided. Corrections for the bound volume which Lords wish to suggest to the report of their speeches should be clearly indicated in a copy of the Daily Report, which, with the column numbers concerned shown on the front cover, should be sent to the Editor of Debates, House of Lords, within 14 days of the date of the Daily Report.

*This issue of the Official Report is also available on the Internet at
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-10-08>*

The first time a Member speaks to a new piece of parliamentary business, the following abbreviations are used to show their party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

No party affiliation is given for Members serving the House in a formal capacity, the Lords spiritual, Members on leave of absence or Members who are otherwise disqualified from sitting in the House.

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Lords 2019,
*this publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence,
which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/.*

House of Lords

Tuesday 8 October 2019

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of London.

Baroness Boothroyd

2.37 pm

The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler): My Lords, on behalf of the whole House, I would like to pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Boothroyd, one of our most distinguished Members, on her 90th birthday. As noble Lords will know, it is not customary to single out individual Members from the Woolsack, but I am very happy to make an exception on this occasion. The noble Baroness was not only an exceptional champion of the ancient and undoubted rights and privileges of the House of Commons as its Speaker but has continued to make an invaluable contribution to this House since she was introduced 18 years ago. She is now widely recognised as a champion of Parliament and the indispensable role it plays in our constitution.

I read recently that the noble Baroness had told the *House* magazine that she considers herself rather timid. While that was not exactly my experience in the Commons, I think I speak for the whole House when I say that her no-nonsense approach is as refreshing today as it was on the day that she took up her seat in the Commons. She has always been independently minded but has, in my experience, always acted with courtesy and charm. She is a role model for all parliamentarians—Speakers very much included. We wish her a very happy birthday.

Noble Lords: Hear, hear!

Baroness Boothroyd (CB): Thank you very much indeed.

Falkland Islands: Landmines

Question

2.39 pm

Asked by Lord Trefgarne

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether landmines laid in the Falkland Islands by the Argentinean forces in 1982 have been removed.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, under the anti-personnel mine ban convention, the UK is obliged to clear the Falkland Islands as its only mined territory. After the conflict in 1982, the UK cleared all known British-laid mines. The remaining mines, spread across 122 minefields, were laid by Argentina. Since 2009, the demining programme has released over 21 million square metres of land and destroyed over 9,700 anti-personnel mines. The current phase of the programme will complete the mine clearance.

Lord Trefgarne (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend for that reply. Is it not the case that there was a new international convention on these matters quite recently—certainly since 1982—which was much encouraged by the support of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, and more recently by His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Absolutely, and I am sure I speak for everyone in your Lordships' House in paying tribute to the late Princess Diana for her incredible leadership on this, drawing attention to the issue of minefields around the world. Of course, we also pay tribute to His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex on his recent trip to Angola to further highlight and continue the good work of his mother.

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, how helpful have the Argentinians been in the clearing process? Shifting sands were always the difficulty, requiring maps and Argentinian personnel to help identify where the minefields were in the first place to allow a proper clearance programme.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: A joint report was done back in 2007, to which the Argentinians contributed, but we are mindful that the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands is that of the United Kingdom. We have taken the lead and sole responsibility for all continued mine clearance.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, I understand from information I got from people doing mine clearance some years ago that the difficulty in the Falklands is the nature of the terrain, or the earth. Some of the unexploded ordnance has sunk so deep into the earth that it is very difficult to clear, which is one reason we have not been able to achieve 100% clearance. I want to use my question to widen the discussion a little. There are so many areas in the world where unexploded ordnance is causing serious risk to ordinary people long after the conflict has ceased. Can the Minister say a little about what we are doing to support MAG and other organisations that are doing this valuable work internationally?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: First, on the earlier point raised by the noble Lord, and made earlier, I agree with him: the terrain has proved challenging. However, we are confident that, with the Ottawa convention and the timeline set for 2024, we will complete all the demining in the Falkland Islands. On the broader issue, we are very much committed. His Royal Highness's recent visit reflects our continued commitment and we have allocated a further £100 million to this primary objective of clearing mines around the world.

Baroness Northover (LD): I think the Minister was referring to the 1997 Ottawa landmine treaty, which aims to free the world of landmines by 2025. The Minister just mentioned Angola; it is likely to be 2045 before it is clear of landmines. At the end of its civil war in 2002, there were as many landmines in Angola as people. What are we doing internationally to build on what Prince Harry has done in southern Africa—particularly

[BARONESS NORTHOVER]

in Zimbabwe and Angola—in that regard? Also, are we ensuring that we are doing all we can to discourage the use of landmines in the conflict in Syria right now, which will cause problems for many years to come?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Baroness is quite right. That is why I mentioned the Ottawa convention. We are abiding by the extension granted by the convention as part of fulfilling our mandate in the Falkland Islands. As for Angola and, indeed, other places, as I have indicated, we are absolutely committed. In 2017, the UK tripled its funding for mine action around the world. As I said in response to the previous question, we have now committed £100 million over three years to tackle the humanitarian and development impact of landmines. This is a scourge that impacts on every conflict zone. I have seen it directly through various visits. The noble Baroness mentioned Syria; of course, that remains a primary concern but we need stability and security in Syria before we can embark on any demining that may be required in that part of the world.

Lord Robathan (Con): I was responsible for clearing landmines in the Falkland Islands and I subsequently became chair of the Halo Trust. The reason we stopped clearing landmines in the Falklands is that certainly more than two people—I am not sure exactly how many—lost limbs clearing Argentinian landmines that were not mapped. There is new technology, but can it clear all these mines without danger to British personnel?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I pay tribute to my noble friend and all those involved in this important work. Demining areas that were previously conflict zones is a key priority and we pay tribute to those who put themselves at risk for this purpose. My noble friend raises an important point about using technology. I assure him that we deploy the best technology available in the work we do internationally. I understand that, subsequent to what happened in previous years, clearing landmines in the Falkland Islands has not resulted in any significant injury to any person.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, the Minister will be aware that these mines were laid in a vain attempt by the Argentinians to prevent the recapture of the islands. The recapture involved a task force of over 60 warships and 73 merchant ships. Twelve of those frigates and destroyers were either sunk or very badly damaged. Today, we have 19 frigates and destroyers. Does the Minister not agree that it is all very well ordering frigates to replace frigates one for one, but we need to increase the number of ships in our Navy to make the seas of the world safer and look after our interests worldwide?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I am sure many are full of admiration for the noble Lord and the work he did in Her Majesty's Navy. I agree with him on the important role that the Navy played during the Falklands crisis. I am sure my colleagues at the Ministry of Defence have noted carefully his suggestion about our current capacity. It is important that we look towards all our military

across the piece, whether it is our Air Force, our Army or our Navy, to ensure they are fit for purpose for 2019 and beyond.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): Does my noble friend agree that there is a great danger of conflating this issue with the very valuable work done by Diana, Princess of Wales, who was mindful that the landmines she was trying to clear were in areas of high population? This does not apply to the Falklands, where all the anti-personnel mines are fenced off. There is a minimal population there and people avoid going near the area where the mines are.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My noble friend is correct that in the Falkland Islands the areas containing mines are clearly and carefully designated, but important work continues to ensure that we can rid the islands of mines altogether. I emphasise the point that the work done by Princess Diana, currently being led by His Royal Highness, provides focus on this important issue, to make it a priority for all countries that can assist in this area.

Sale of Knives

Question

2.47 pm

Asked by **Lord Naseby**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to ensure that retailers selling kitchen knives adhere to regulations on the sale of knives.

Lord Naseby (Con): I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, and in doing so I declare an interest, in that my daughter has a cook-shop in Bedford.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, it has been an offence for many years to sell a knife to anyone under 18 in England and Wales, including kitchen knives. The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 will further strengthen the law on the online sale and delivery of knives. We continue to work with retailers to ensure that they have effective measures in place to prevent underage sales of knives.

Lord Naseby: Does my noble friend agree that we should pay tribute to the supermarkets and others which have carried out age challenges? Are there not two other areas we should seriously consider concerning the awful challenge that we face? First, could trading standards not do a thorough check throughout the retail trade and with the online trade in some way to ensure that everybody is complying with the age challenge? Secondly, could Her Majesty's Government not consider introducing legislation to extend the Primary Authority scheme to knives as soon as possible, ideally in the Queen's Speech?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I join my noble friend in paying tribute to the supermarkets and the work they have done in this area. I think it is Morrisons and Lidl which have decided not to sell knives in store. Asda has stopped selling single knives and other

supermarkets have either stopped or restricted the sale of knives in areas where levels of knife crime are particularly high. We enforce this Act through trading standards and the use of test purchase operations in store and online. The £500,000 prosecution fund, which was introduced as part of the serious violence strategy, helps trading standards to prosecute rogue retailers that repeatedly fail test purchases.

Baroness Hollins (CB): My Lords, I speak as the mother of a victim of knife crime. I am surprised that the “No Points” campaign has not been mentioned; perhaps Members are unaware of it. However, identifying which variables can be changed to make it difficult to commit a particular harm has been proven to succeed. For example, restricting the amount of paracetamol that you can buy led to fewer deaths from paracetamol overdoses. Sixty years ago, our domestic gas supply changed from coal gas to natural gas, thus effectively removing an effective means of taking one’s own’s life that was readily to hand, and there was a profound drop in the rate of suicide. Does the Minister agree that it would be worth piloting the recommendations in the “No Points” campaign to see if it can achieve similar results for homicide? The point of the campaign is that you do not need a point in the kitchen, and there are good designs available.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I totally empathise with where the noble Baroness is coming from. She speaks from personal experience when she outlines the devastation that knives can cause to communities. I have some empathy with the “No Points” campaign, although there are very dangerous knives that do not have points at all, such as machetes. The Government believe that the current controls, which will be strengthened by the Offensive Weapons Act, will support this. A further point—no pun intended—is that it is not only legislation that will reduce and curtail knife crime.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): I declare my interest as chair of National Trading Standards, an organisation that receives Home Office money to deal with the sale of knives to underage people. Can the noble Baroness tell the House what further measures she thinks are necessary in respect of handling online sales—making sure that delivery points are properly safeguarded and follow the law—and whether similar arrangements should be extended to the sale, in stores or online, of acids and corrosive materials?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: This is a subject that the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, and others discussed with me during the passage of the Bill. We decided not to do so—that corrosive products are clearly labelled. It is true that in both the online and retail worlds, age has to be verified at both ends, and how the online or street retailer does that is up to them. It is, however, an offence to deliver to a delivery box or a residential address without that verification.

Baroness Pinnock (LD): My Lords, I draw the attention of the House to my local authority interests as recorded in the register. This year’s APPG report on knife crime demonstrated a link between the serious cuts in services to young people—for example, local authority youth services received a 70% cut in funding—and knife crime.

Effective measures to reduce knife crime must include significant rises in funding for youth services. Does the Minister agree?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: What I do agree with is that the issues of knife crime are complex, many and varied.

The Lord Bishop of London: My Lords, as the Bishop of London, knife crime is of huge concern to me and a source of great sorrow. I thank the noble Baroness for her response regarding the “No Points” campaign. However, research undertaken by the Home Office Scientific Development Branch showed that round knives had significantly less penetration capability than pointed knives and are therefore less likely to be life-threatening. Will the noble Baroness comment on how the Government are responding to the advice given by the Scientific Development Branch?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank the right reverend Prelate for that question. On round versus pointed knives, as I said to the noble Baroness, it is not necessarily the point that is lethal, hence machetes. The legislation is not the only solution in tackling this problem.

Museums and Galleries: Financial Sustainability Question

2.55 pm

Asked by *Lord Lee of Trafford*

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what assessment they have made of the current financial sustainability of national museums and galleries.

Lord Lee of Trafford (LD): In begging leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, I declare an interest as the chairman of the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, the 2017 *Strategic Review of DCMS-sponsored Museums* found that the national museums and galleries received £340 million in government grant in 2016-17—around 42% of their total income, which also comprised other public funding, donations and self-generated income. Year on year, this investment, maintained in real terms for the next spending review, allows them to welcome millions of visitors, promote Britain to the world, and protect and preserve their unique collections for their global audiences.

Lord Lee of Trafford: I hear what the Minister said, but in a letter to the *Times* last week headlined “Neglected Museums At Breaking Point”, museum chiefs and the director of the Art Fund drew attention to the serious essential maintenance backlog at our national museums. Do not the fires in Notre-Dame and the Glasgow School of Art, and, indeed, the costs and upheaval we now face on the Parliamentary Estate, point to the dangers and extra costs of putting off vital necessary work? I urge DCMS Ministers to shake the Javid/Johnson

[LORD LEE OF TRAFFORD]

money tree for extra resources to protect our national treasures. If the Government wish to maintain free entry, they surely have to pay for it.

Baroness Barran: The noble Lord is absolutely right that many of our national museums are housed in wonderful heritage buildings, but those buildings require constant upkeep, which is obviously very expensive. To help address this, the Government awarded earlier this year £44 million of one-off funding over the next two years to support essential maintenance for our national museums.

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab): Does the Minister share my view that the experience of visiting galleries and museums has changed quite radically in recent years since we saw the introduction and extension of the iPad and iPhones? Often when we try to see a picture we are surrounded by people taking selfies in front of it. It has changed completely from what it used to be. There is a great opportunity for museums and galleries to raise money from this. It is very simple indeed: nobody takes a camera in unless they pay a fee to do so. Could she try to run an experiment with a museum or a gallery to see how that works and just how much money could be raised?

Baroness Barran: I had not thought about it in quite the same way as the noble Lord, although when I go to a museum with my children I spend quite a lot of time trying to stop them taking photographs of the pictures. I am not sure about selfies, but more seriously, I am happy to take his suggestion back to my colleague in the department.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, we reap considerable financial and cultural rewards from what is a modest state investment in our national museums, but would not the Minister admit that museums cannot continue to be shackled by association with fossil fuel companies? It would be a sign of the Government's seriousness about addressing climate change if they pledged to cover the shortfall in funding when museums, as is inevitable, drop that sponsorship. Will the Government do so?

Baroness Barran: The noble Lord will be aware that museums act as arm's-length bodies. Therefore, it is up to the trustees of each museum to scrutinise potential donors and make their own judgments on this.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, for the very first time, I find myself in absolute disagreement with the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty. I believe it is very important that museums and galleries should receive sponsorship. Where does one draw the line? If a bank was "BP Bank" and offered some sponsorship, would one not accept it? That is utterly ridiculous and totally against the interests of our great museums. I do not mind saying to my noble friend that I would be delighted to receive some sponsorship from BP for the art gallery that I am struggling to save in Lincoln.

Baroness Barran: I cannot speak for BP or the art gallery in Lincoln, but I reiterate that these are complicated and sensitive decisions, which the trustees of each museum need to deal with.

Baroness Doocey (LD): My Lords, will the Government consider designating other regional museums as national museums, to better and more accurately reflect their nationally and globally significant collections, and, crucially, to try to prevent the gradual decline caused by local authority funding cuts?

Baroness Barran: The Government do not have any plans to designate any other museums as national museums. Moves have been made to increase funding, particularly to regional museums, through Arts Council England; obviously, we are very keen for them to thrive. We have seen new museums open regionally, and important loans have majorly boosted visitor numbers. We are keen to see that continue.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, many other large cities have a hotel tax. One only has to go to New York to see that it is quite a large percentage of what one pays. What about having a hotel tax in some of our cities—particularly London, which is awash with tourists all the time—and using at least some of the proceeds as a contribution to our museums and galleries?

Baroness Barran: Again, the noble Lord makes an interesting suggestion. Our broader view is that we expect museums and galleries to continue to be funded by a mixture of public money, philanthropic money and other forms of fundraising.

Visa Applications: Dr Mu-Chun Chiang *Question*

3.01 pm

Asked by Lord Greaves

To ask Her Majesty's Government what (1) lessons they have learnt, and (2) procedures they intend to change, following the reconsideration of the visa application by Dr Mu-Chun Chiang.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, I am pleased that the case of Dr Chiang was successfully resolved following the provision of new evidence by Dr Chiang and reconsideration by UK Visas and Immigration. UK Visas and Immigration continually utilises customer feedback and experiences to review processes and procedures with the aim of enhancing services.

Lord Greaves (LD): My Lords, this was indeed an unusual case in that the Home Office gave in before the bitter end. About 20 years ago, I first came across immigration and nationality issues with the Home Office when a busload of asylum seekers was dumped on an industrial estate in Colne in the middle of the night. Experiences then—and, I am sorry to say, since then—have led me to believe that too much of the immigration and nationality section of the Home Office is riddled with what I would call bureaucratic incompetence tinged with institutional racism. Nothing has improved; in fact, it has got worse. Recently, the

co-chair of the Green Party suggested that the immigration and nationality functions should be separated off and made into a separate department, starting again based on a culture of efficiency and humanity. Is that something that the Minister will put forward to her colleagues for the Queen's Speech?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: On the noble Lord's last point, about a culture that is far more humane, I would certainly totally subscribe to that, as would the Home Secretary. Regarding the balance between bureaucracy and subjectivity, it was the criticism of subjectivity that led to a much more objective way of determining applications. The noble Lord referred to a coach-load of asylum seekers 18 years ago; I am afraid that neither I nor the Conservative Party can answer for what happened 18 years ago. He also talked about the Home Office giving in before the bitter end; actually, the case was resolved quickly—not that I am in any way trying to defend the fact that it could have been resolved more quickly.

Lord Rosser (Lab): For a Government who think there is far too much red tape and what they describe as bureaucracy, it is revealing that, when it comes to dealing with work visa applications, rigid application of the very strict rules seems to be the order of the day. The reality is that the decision on Dr Chiang only got changed because there was a lot of adverse publicity about the actions of the Home Office and influential people took up the case. How many other decisions, of a similar kind to Dr Chiang's, have already been taken and enforced by the Home Office under its now renamed hostile environment policy because the individuals adversely and unfairly affected were not able to get the necessary publicity and support of influential people to get the Home Office ruling changed? Do the Government know the answer to that question? Do they care about it?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, we certainly do care. The issue was resolved very quickly, and it is not correct that it only got changed because people intervened. It got changed because new evidence that had been asked for was produced. The fact that we have a 98% grant rate for such applications is evidence of how many people successfully apply.

Lord Storey (LD): My Lords, the Minister may recall that I wrote to her regarding a young Indian girl who wanted to come and spend Christmas with her relatives in Liverpool. She applied twice for a tourist visa and twice was turned down. The Minister kindly put me in touch with the relevant Home Office official, and it was found out that she had been turned down because there was an unexplained sum of money in her bank account—she was fully employed in India. The unexplained money was from her father to pay for her trip. I refer to what my noble friend Lord Greaves said: should officials not deal with these applications with a more sensitive and humanitarian touch?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I do; I agree. The case was resolved, which is good. As I said to the noble Lord, Lord Rosser, 98% of these types of visas are granted.

Road Closures in Central London

Private Notice Question

3.07 pm

Asked by Lord Forsyth of Drumlean

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that roads in central London, including those leading to the Houses of Parliament, are clear and free from obstruction and what is their assessment of the performance of the Metropolitan Police in this regard.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, the right to protest peacefully is a long-standing tradition in this country. However, this does not extend to unlawful behaviour and the police have powers to deal with such acts. The use of these powers, and the management of demonstrations, are operational matters for the police. The Government have been clear that they expect a firm stance to be taken against protesters who significantly disrupt the lives of others.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: My Lords, what then is the meaning of the sessional order passed by this House at the beginning of this Session? It reads:

"It was ordered that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Lords to and from this House during the sitting of Parliament; or to hinder Lords in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties on the Parliamentary Estate". The failure of the commissioner to comply with that Motion resulted in a number of disabled colleagues being unable to leave the House yesterday because taxis and other vehicles were not able to come here and they were not able to walk considerable distances in the rain. It resulted in a huge disruption to business. I ate in a restaurant last night where there was only one occupied table; all the others had been cancelled. It resulted in congestion throughout the city, adding to pollution. Surely my noble friend needs to intervene, or is this just another example of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick, doing her best and it not being good enough?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I empathise with most of what my noble friend has just said. He is absolutely right about pollution: central London is now gridlocked, with nobody able to get in or out. The effect on businesses is quite disgraceful, particularly small businesses such as restaurants. This morning, I had to step over people to get into the Home Office, so I absolutely take his point about disabled Members of this House and the other place. It has been difficult enough to get in here when you are able-bodied, never mind if you are disabled.

I observed something else this morning. I took the bus in and it was apparent that the bus could get me only to Piccadilly Circus. It was fine for me, because I could walk, but people who cannot afford to take the

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]

Tube were forced to do so this morning or they would not have got in. That particularly stands for disabled people, so I completely accept my noble friend's point. I know that the police are in discussion and that half the sites have now been cleared, but we are endeavouring to clear the other half.

Baroness Boothroyd (CB): My Lords, as Speaker of the House of Commons over many years I read out the sessional orders that were accepted by the House at the beginning of every Session. Later that day it was always confirmed to me that they had been received by the police, were understood and were being carried out. I am not an anti-demonstrator. I confess to your Lordships with pride that, as a young person, I carried the banner at many demonstrations in central London, but in those days the police were in control of me as a demonstrator. Now it seems to me that the demonstrators are in control of the police. When is that going to change? When will we have some sensible methods of getting into our work and carrying out the democratic process in this building?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I completely agree with the noble Baroness: for an ordinary member of the public, the balance feels to have been skewed. I understand that the Met was last in contact this morning and, as I said, half the sites have now been cleared, but nobody should be in the position where they simply cannot access their place of work, not least the people making laws in this country.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, it is not often that I am driven to protect the reputation of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, but on this occasion I think that some balance has been achieved. I deeply regret that any Members were not able to get in but, if we are going to talk about gridlock, is the Minister aware that the gridlock on Lambeth Bridge this morning was from cars, and almost every car had a single occupant? They were also, of course, polluting. On air pollution, is the Minister aware that air pollution levels in central London have probably dropped—I monitor this quite closely—simply because our roads are full of brave Extinction Rebellion planet protectors, rather than filthy, dirty cars?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, I agree with the noble Baroness about balance, and that is what the Met police are trying to achieve, but I cannot agree with her about the Extinction Rebellion protesters. I have had a little campaign of my own over the past 24 hours, which has been to go around photographing single-use plastics, which are strewn all over Westminster. The amount of pollution caused by the gridlocked cars is unbelievable, and the pictures of very old diesel 4x4s going along country roads on Sunday, as if somehow making a difference to the planet, were just ridiculous.

Baroness Thomas of Winchester (LD): My Lords, we are all very glad that this is a peaceful demonstration, but it makes life very difficult for those of us who are disabled, particularly Members of this House who find walking very hard. At least we have wheels under

us. What advice does the Minister have for us for next week, particularly starting on Monday? How will we get to the House to take part in debates on the Queen's Speech? The weather may turn bad, and if there are no cars to bring us here, it will make life very difficult.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I understand that the protesters will not disrupt the Queen's Speech. It would be quite ironic if they did, given that she will arrive in a horse and cart and they are driving trucks to London.

Noble Lords: A horse and carriage.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Or a carriage. We can be sure that she will get here by a very green method indeed. The noble Baroness might say that it is peaceful; it feels peaceful but with sinister undertones.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, how do Ministers respond to the legitimate argument made by many of the demonstrators, that only demonstrations that irritate or annoy the establishment ever have any effect?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I do not think that is true. We talked about balance earlier; we are a country that absolutely allows for peaceful protest. We are talking about people not being able to get into work, businesses being disrupted and the disabled of your Lordships' House and the other place not being able to get to their place of work. That is slightly different. It is absolutely vital that the people of this country are able to protest peacefully, but not to disrupt the entire infrastructure of the city of London.

Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con): My Lords, is the Minister aware that much more serious than any of the factors mentioned so far is the fact that patients who are ill have been prevented from getting into St Thomas' Hospital? That is a scandal. Doctors cannot get in there either to treat them. What will be done about it? It is a monstrous situation.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I agree with my noble friend that it is monstrous. People may be unable to seek medical treatment or, indeed, emergency treatment in St Thomas'. Exactly the same thing happened in Bristol, where somebody could not get to see their dying parent, who died before they could get to see them. It is monstrous. As I said, half the sites are now cleared, and I hope that the area around St Thomas' Hospital will be accessible to all those who need to go there.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, dealing with the nature and volume of demonstrations we are currently seeing is very resource-intensive. Does the Minister agree that the dramatic reductions in police numbers under this Government not only impact on day-to-day policing but reduce the resilience of the police and their ability to respond to such demonstrations?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Certainly, this current set of protests has been very resource-intensive. Obviously, the noble Lord will join me in being very pleased about the plans for 20,000 more police officers over the next three years.

Sir Richard Henriques Report

Private Notice Question

3.18 pm

Asked by Lord Cormack

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the publication of the report by Sir Richard Henriques and the publication of the report by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) on Operation Midland, whether they will review the composition and terms of reference of the IOPC.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, while this is clearly a concerning case, it is vital that an organisation such as the IOPC operates independently of both the police and the Government. The Government have introduced reforms to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, progress has been made and we expect that trajectory to continue. The Home Secretary has asked HMICFRS to conduct an inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service to ensure that lessons have been learned from the issues highlighted. This will take into consideration the IOPC recommendations.

Lord Cormack: My Lords, while I thank my noble friend for her Answer, I must regret that it is nowhere near as robust as the Answer she gave to my noble friend Lord Forsyth. Does she agree that Sir Richard has performed a notable public service by examining rigorously a very shameful episode in our history which tarnished the reputations of some great people? Does she agree that, in contrast, the IOPC, whose duty should surely be to be a rigorous upholder of the highest possible standards, has delivered an abject apology for an appalling failure?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I would most certainly agree with my noble friend that Sir Richard has performed a notable public service. It is also important that we have an independent body that oversees, independently of both the police and the Government, the conduct of the police, so I would disagree with my noble friend on the second point.

Lord Rosser (Lab): Yesterday, I asked the Government what they meant in their response to an Urgent Question when they said that the Chief Inspector of Constabulary should,

“take account of the findings of the report of the Independent Office for Police Conduct”.

I asked if it meant that the Chief Inspector of Constabulary would take the findings of the IOPC report as read, or whether he would be able to consider, if he so wished, whether some of the report's conclusions or statements were, in his view, valid or not. In response, the Government said that they meant that the chief inspector would,

“consider the Metropolitan Police Service's progress in learning from the ... recommendations of the IOPC report”.—[*Official Report*, 7/10/19; cols. 1985-86].

Would it not be helpful if the chief inspector was also able to consider, if he so wished, whether some of the conclusions or statements in the IOPC report were valid or not?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, in drawing up the terms of reference for the inspection, HMICFRS will come to its own conclusions about what the noble Lord has just outlined. I think taking into account the IOPC's recommendation means taking a view of it in the round.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, Sir Richard Henriques's report states that there were such inconsistencies between the fantasist Nick's statements to Wiltshire Police and his later account to the Metropolitan Police that it was obvious that Nick's account could not be relied on. In the full knowledge of that information, the senior investigating officer told a press conference that what Nick had said was “credible and true”. How can the so-called Independent Office for Police Conduct exonerate all those involved in such circumstances? Who are the IOPC trying to protect, and who was the DAC in overall charge of the investigation's line manager at the time?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: First, the noble Lord will know that Wiltshire Police dismissed the claims of Nick. On his question of who the IOPC is trying to protect, the IOPC is independent of both government and the police, and it is absolutely right that such a body exists to be able to scrutinise them.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick (Con): My Lords, I welcome the Henriques report on both the police force and the IOPC. I regret to have to make this point, but will my noble friend also comment on the role of Tom Watson, who seems to have unduly pressurised the police and who made the terrible remark about the late Lord Brittan that he was as near to evil as any human being could be—a remark made without any real foundation? Does she not agree that anyone who can make such a remark on such flimsy evidence is not fit to hold public office?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My noble friend reminds me of how the influence of public figures can influence the progress of an investigation. The decisions that Tom Watson makes about his future will be a matter for him, but it is very important that in the future the police are allowed to get on and do their job without external influence, particularly from people who are quite influential themselves.

Lord Lea of Crondall (Lab): My Lords, I have mentioned to my neighbour in Crondall, Lord Bramall, the satisfaction that many must feel at the robust nature of the final report of Sir Richard Henriques. I have also made a point—and perhaps the Minister will comment on this—about the sniping about Cressida Dick, who is good news as the recently appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Further to the question asked by the Member from the Liberal

[LORD LEA OF CRONDALL]

Democrat party, she should not take the rap for the dreadful mistakes made in this matter by the Metropolitan Police.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, in terms of taking the rap, the Henriques report makes it clear where accountability or failings have lain. It is a matter for the Metropolitan Police to hold the commissioner to account.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB): My Lords, is it not the case that this sorry story might never have unfolded if anonymity remained for victims until the police are ready to charge?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Of course, the presumption is anonymity before charge, but there will be circumstances where the police will feel it necessary to release names—although that is not in most cases; quite honestly, in a lot or most of the cases recently, it was through the media actually releasing names. It is against the law, I think, and anonymity before charge is an important standard to uphold, but of course we can all think of people who, had anonymity not been there, may never have come to justice.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): Can my noble friend tell us a little more about the scope of the proposed Sir Tom Winsor inquiry? What did she mean when she said that it would ensure that lessons have been learned? Does she not agree that, in addition to Carl Beech himself and the appalling incompetence of the police, there are a good many other parties involved who carry responsibility in this miserable affair, including some grandstanding Members of the other place and the more venal parts of the media—although there have been some very brave journalists as well? Is there not an important case for the Home Secretary to widen the scope of the inquiry. I greatly welcome that she has taken this move at last, in line with the very strong feelings of this House, but should this not be a wider inquiry into a miserable and disastrous affair, which reflects very badly on all those involved?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I do not disagree with my noble friend calling it a miserable and disastrous affair. I know that the Home Secretary has been in communication with HMICFRS, not to try and direct the role of the inspection but to discuss with it what might be within the scope of the inquiry.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, returning to the issue of anonymity, the law does not work, and the Minister knows it. Many reputations have been destroyed. Can I raise the question that I raised the other day about Mr Steve Rodhouse, director-general of operations at the National Crime Agency, who is principally responsible for this disaster? Why is he not going to be sacked?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I am afraid that the matter concerning the individual whom the noble Lord mentioned is a matter between him and the NCA.

Brexit: Preparations

Statement

3.29 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Lord Callanan) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House I will repeat a Statement made today by my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in another place. The Statement is as follows:

“Mr Speaker, with your permission I would like to make a Statement on our preparations to leave the European Union on 31 October and the steps that we are taking to get ready.

It is the strong desire of this Government to leave the EU with a deal. Our proposals to replace the backstop were published last week. I commend the Prime Minister and the Exit Secretary for their continued efforts to ensure that we can leave the EU with a withdrawal agreement in place. We have put forward a fair and reasonable compromise for all sides that respects the historic referendum result, and we hope that the EU will engage with us seriously.

In setting out these proposals, we have moved—it is now time for the EU to move, too. If it does, there is still every chance that we will leave with a new deal. However, if the EU does not move, this Government are prepared to leave without a deal on 31 October. We must get Brexit done so that the country can move on and focus on improving the NHS, cutting crime, helping families with the cost of living and further improving school standards.

In preparing for every eventuality, we are today publishing our *No-Deal Readiness Report*. This document is a comprehensive summary of the UK’s preparedness for leaving the EU without a deal. It sets out the preparations that the Government have made and how they have been intensified under the determined leadership of my right honourable friend the Prime Minister, and also the steps that third-party organisations and individuals need to take in order to get ready.

The actions in this report reflect our top priority: ensuring that we maintain the smooth and efficient flow of goods and people from the UK into the EU and vice versa. The actions are also aimed at ensuring that we continue to support citizens—upholding their rights and helping them prepare for the changes ahead.

In order to prepare for Brexit, my right honourable friend the Chancellor has doubled funding from £4 billion to £8 billion. We have also published a significant volume of material relating to no-deal planning, including 750 pieces of guidance setting out the steps that businesses, traders and citizens should take in order to prepare. We have also published 31 country guides for all EU/EFTA states, setting out what UK nationals living there need to do in order to get ready for Brexit. And this morning my right honourable friend the Trade Secretary published the temporary tariff regime that will apply from 1 November. In all, it liberalises tariffs on 88% of goods by value entering the UK. It maintains a mixture of tariffs and quotas on 12% of goods, such as beef, lamb, pork, poultry and some dairy products,

to support farms and producers who have historically been protected through high EU tariffs. As a result of cutting these tariffs, we should see a 15% reduction in the cost of honey from New Zealand, a 9% cut in the cost of grapes from South America and, of course, a 7% reduction in the cost of wine from Argentina.

Businesses raised a number of points in response to the publication of the original tariff schedule in March. The Government listened carefully to these representations and made three specific changes as a result. We are reducing tariffs on HGVs entering the UK, adjusting tariffs on bioethanol to retain support for UK producers and applying tariffs to additional clothing products to ensure that developing countries continue to have preferential access.

But it is not enough for just the Government to get ready; we need businesses and citizens to get ready too. Even with every government project complete, and necessary IT systems in place, flow at the border would still be affected if hauliers did not have the right paperwork. If companies do not prepare, they will face challenges in trading their goods and services with the EU. While the Government can of course lobby EU member states to improve their offer to UK nationals living in their countries, we need individuals to act as well, to register for residency and to make arrangements for continued access to healthcare. For that reason, the Government are investing £100 million in one of the largest public information campaigns in peacetime. Through both mass market and targeted advertising, we are alerting businesses and citizens to the actions they need to take to get ready. We are also providing a further £108 million to support businesses in accessing the information and advice they need.

My right honourable friend the Business Secretary is overseeing a series of events with businesses around the country, designed to provide information on all the steps that they need to take to get ready, including actions that will support the flow of trade through the short straits. My right honourable friend the Health Secretary has today established a trader readiness support unit for suppliers of medical products. This week, HMRC is writing to 180,000 businesses setting out the full range of steps that they need to take in order to import and export with the EU after we leave. Of course, in advance of 31 October, we will continue to use every means at our disposal to communicate to businesses the need to get ready.

I want to pay particular tribute to the automotive, retail and transport sectors, including authorities at the Port of Dover and Calais, as well as Eurotunnel, for the extent of their Brexit preparations. On a recent visit to the West Midlands, the heartland of our automotive industry, I was impressed by the steps that manufacturers are taking to prepare. Retail businesses have also made significant strides: Morrisons, for example, now reports that it is 'prepared for all eventualities' in the UK, while the Co-op says that it is 'prepared for the worst case'. Of course, risks remain and challenges for some businesses cannot be entirely mitigated, even with every possible preparation in place. But the UK economy is in a much better position to meet those risks and challenges thanks to the efforts of those sectors and companies and my right honourable friend the Chancellor.

It is also the case that the impact of no deal on both the UK and the EU will depend on decisions taken by the EU and its member states. On citizens' rights, internal security, data protection and the vital position of Northern Ireland, we have taken decisions that will benefit UK nationals as well as EU citizens. I hope that the EU will match the generosity and flexibility that we have shown.

Through the EU settlement scheme, we have ensured that every EU citizen resident here by 31 October can acquire a formal UK immigration status, protecting their rights to live and work in the UK. To date, 1.7 million citizens have applied and 1.5 million have been granted a status. Those who have not yet applied have until the end of December 2020 to do so. So far, very few EU member states have made as generous an offer to UK nationals as the UK has made to EU citizens. We do not believe that citizens' rights should be used as a bargaining chip in any scenario. EU citizens in the UK are our friends and family—we want them to stay. We now hope that the EU extends the same hand of friendship towards UK nationals as we have to EU nationals.

At the same time, keeping our fellow citizens safe should be a priority on all sides. My right honourable friend the Home Secretary has written to Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans to ensure that effective arrangements are in place on the exchange of passenger name record data, disconnection from SIS II and working arrangements with Europol, as well as the transfer of law enforcement data. We hope that the EU will respond positively, in the interests of the shared security of us all. We have also unilaterally ensured that personal data can continue to flow freely and legally from the UK to the EU and the EEA. A swift adequacy decision from the EU would reciprocate this arrangement, providing legal certainty to EU entities and UK companies.

With respect to Northern Ireland, in order to avoid a hard border, we have committed not to introduce any checks at the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The limited number of checks that need to take place, due to international obligations, will all be carried out well away from the border and will affect only a very small number of businesses. The Irish Government and the EU have not yet set out how they will manage the Irish border if we leave without a deal. We urge them to match our commitment.

Let me finally turn to the opportunities from Brexit as laid out in the report. For the first time in 50 years, the UK will have an independent trade policy and we will be able to take our own seat at the World Trade Organization. We will be able to introduce a points-based immigration system that prioritises the skills that we need as a country. We will have autonomy over the rules governing our world-leading services sector and continue our leading role in setting global standards for financial services. We can be a beacon for the world in setting progressive policies on farming, fishing and the wider environment and, outside the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, we will set our own rules, putting in place smarter, more responsive regulation.

Of course, no deal will bring challenges and I have been open about that today, as I have been in the past. It is not my preferred outcome, nor that of

[LORD CALLANAN]
the Government. We want a good deal, but whatever challenges no deal may create in the short term, and they are significant, these can and will be overcome. Far worse than the disruption of no deal would be the damage to democracy caused by dishonouring the referendum result. Some 17.4 million people voted to leave, many of them turning out to vote for the first time in their lives. They voted to ensure that the laws by which we are governed are set by the politicians in this place whom they elect. They voted for a fairer immigration system which attracts the brightest and the best. They voted to end vast financial contributions to the EU budget and instead invest in the people's priorities such as the NHS and our brave police service. That is what the British people voted for and that is what this Government will deliver. I commend the Statement to the House".

My Lords, that concludes the Statement.

3.40 pm

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement which, despite what we hear from sources at No. 10, claims, "the strong desire of this Government to leave the EU with a deal". It is now 76 days since Mr Johnson became Prime Minister and 23 days until 31 October, but he has failed to get a deal: a failure that he said, and for which he would share responsibility, would represent "a failure of statecraft". So, we have no deal, but is that the fault of the Prime Minister and his incompetence? Oh no, it is the fault of those pesky Europeans; it is the fault of the unbending Irish; it is the fault of Mrs Merkel; it is the fault of those pesky parliamentarians; and it is probably the fault of your Lordships' House. But the truth, as we now know from the ever-helpful *Spectator*, is that there is no desire for a deal. It is all a ruse.

The Government are spending taxpayers' money on advertisements to promote the 31 October date and the notion that we will leave on that day even though it would be unlawful without the consent of the House of Commons. The ads and the endless repetition of the date are all to absolve this incompetent Prime Minister of his failure, and it is all about preparing for an election where he can blame everyone but himself for our continued membership. But at what cost? What would be the cost of that much-trailed no deal? The IFS says £150 billion a year for business in administration alone, while the Government themselves are spending £8 billion to soften the blow. Then there are the tariffs to be paid by exporters, consumers and some importers—although not on Argentinian wine or New Zealand honey, which are not very high on the ordinary person's shopping list. We will see higher food prices for consumers and the ending of pet passports. I am not making this up. It is all in the misnamed document I have in my hand. This is called "readiness", despite what we hear from Ireland, from farmers, manufacturers, exporters, road hauliers, expats, medics and small businesses—that we are woefully unready. Indeed, it makes Ethelred the Unready seem extraordinarily well prepared.

Tariffs would hit us three weeks on Friday with an immediate impact on availability and prices. UK citizens abroad would lose some of their rights, while traffic

congestion near Dover would make Parliament Square look like an open space. Moreover, with no adequacy agreement, any firm without an appropriate contract would lose data flow rights while the European arrest warrant would end. I say again: three weeks on Friday. Small businesses, hit by customs declarations for the first time, will be stymied in their work, and it is clear that the Government, despite this Statement, simply do not want a deal and are playing with people's livelihoods. As Mr Tusk writes,

"what's at stake is not winning some stupid ... game. At stake is the future of Europe and the UK as well as the security and interests of our people".

Speaking to the Prime Minister, he says:

"You don't want a deal ... you don't want an extension".

That says it all. The Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland agrees with the Tusk statement, which she says, "reflects the frustration across EU and the enormity of what's at stake ... We remain open to finalize a fair #Brexit deal but need a UK Govt willing to work with EU to get it done".

We are pleased that the Government have published this document. However, let us be clear: we on this side of the House—I probably speak for the whole House, not just this side—will do everything in our power to ensure that the no-deal nightmare does not come to pass.

I have only two questions for the Minister. First, does he really think that his Government will be thanked for taking the UK out of the European Union in this way? Secondly, does he think that the EU will help us to find a way forward when Leave.EU tweets over a picture of Mrs Merkel today the words:

"We didn't win two world wars to be pushed around by a kraut"?

Is the Minister as embarrassed by that as I am?

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, it is very difficult to know how much of this Statement to believe. It says that the Government still think that there is a chance of no deal. The text from No. 10 from last night—which the *Spectator* has now published—suggests that people with influence inside No. 10 have clearly entirely given up on the idea of a deal and are moving towards an election, so we have to treat this as the beginning of a series of election statements.

The statement that we will leave with no deal if necessary is a statement that the Government will defy the law. That is also an interesting statement for the Government to make to Parliament at this point. I note that, among other things, last night's text says:

"To marginalise the Brexit Party, we will have to fight the election on the basis of 'no more delays, get Brexit done immediately'". If that is what the national interest has come down to, we are all in deep trouble. Dominic Cummings appears to text as madly and prolifically as Donald Trump tweets.

There are a number of other fantasies in the text. However, I would like to start by pressing the Minister a little more on the fantasy that he gave us yesterday in suggesting that one could have production with different standards for the domestic and export markets. I am not sure whether the Government have had any discussions with any industrial sectors about having separate production lines. Perhaps they could tell us. We know very well that cross-contamination makes that sort of thing very difficult indeed in the food industry.

The pharmaceutical industry depends on global markets, global standards and global research efforts. It will cease production in Britain if we start doing things like that. Non-tariff barriers produced by the British at different standards might also get us into trouble with the World Trade Organization.

If and when we leave the European Union, we will become “an independent trading country” again—as the Statement says—but we will not become an entirely independent economy. We depend very heavily on multinational companies which produce and invest in this country. If they cease doing so, we will all be poorer.

The Statement congratulates the automotive industry on how well prepared it is. What preparations is it making? It is closing plants for periods and reducing plans to build new models in this country. I remember a representative of the automotive sector saying to me in a briefing some weeks ago that it is now impossible to justify new investment in this country. That is the sort of preparation that it is making. This will make us and our children poorer over a longer period.

Another fantasy is that the World Trade Organization will be a major gain for Britain because we will have our own seat; this does not accept the deep crisis within the WTO which the United States has itself created. There is a failure to recognise that between the referendum three years ago and now there has been a downturn in the world economy, a protectionist turn in US policy and a trade conflict between the US and China, which makes the international context in which we manage the British economy much more difficult.

No form of Brexit offers comparable benefits to staying in the EU. That is what, after three years of discussions, the Government have discovered. As a result, the Government are not saying, “Now that we have been through all this, we need to modify our position”. They are saying, “Now that we have been through all this, we need to mitigate the disaster we are committing the country to”. This is a betrayal of Margaret Thatcher’s legacy. She pushed through the European single market as a major exercise in globalisation and deregulation by having common standards in one of the biggest markets in the world. The Government are now retreating to the idea that we will have our own little standards in a much smaller and weaker economy.

There have been all these comments about “vast financial contributions” to the EU budget. As I recall—since we are one of the richer countries and a major contributor—these are said to be £9 billion per year. Well, so far, we have spent £8 billion on the additional costs of leaving, and we have not yet begun to calculate the costs that we will incur from having to replace the shared agencies and facilities to which we have contributed as part of the EU with separate, national facilities. I mentioned yesterday the Joint European Torus in Culham; this is to become a national facility for which, I assume, the British Government will in future pay all the costs rather than a contribution towards shared costs. That is the sort of new cost that we will be developing.

When it comes to Britain in the world, where is British foreign policy? There is no sense of where Britain goes. This is a Vote Leave Government, not a Conservative

Government. So much in this Statement seems to be without any foundation whatever. Lastly, it says there will be “damage to democracy” from “dishonouring” the referendum result. After the referendum, our current Prime Minister published an article in the *Telegraph* saying that there was no question that we had to leave the single market. He has changed his mind. Is it not time the Government changed their mind?

Lord Callanan: I thank the noble Baroness and the noble Lord for their comments and questions. I say to my opposite number, the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter, that what I found interesting about her lengthy contribution—she had a number of clever debating points to make—was that she said nothing at all about Labour’s policy on Brexit. Of course, as we all know, Labour is against everything: against a deal, against no deal, against revoking Article 50. One of these days, maybe even in our debates, we may get to discover what the Labour Party is in favour of.

I will correct some of the points that the noble Baroness made. She said that it is unlawful to leave without a deal. That is not correct. Leaving without a deal is the legal—

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: I referred to leaving without a deal without the consent of the House of Commons.

Lord Callanan: The record will show what the noble Baroness said. I wrote down that she said it was unlawful to leave without a deal, which, as she has now correctly said, is not the case. That is now for the European Council to determine as a matter of EU law. She said that businesses would lose their data flow rights; that is also not true. We have put in place substantial mitigations through standard contractual clauses. The Statement said that this will enable the transfer of data. We are urging the EU to put in place a proper adequacy decision, which should be straightforward on the basis that our regulation is, in fact, identical. We hope that it will do that.

Lastly, the noble Baroness asked me to condemn—which I happily do—the embarrassing, incorrect tweet from Leave.EU. Germany is a close friend, neighbour and ally. That comment was appalling and I join her in condemning it.

Moving on to the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, I picked up very few questions in his contribution. He said businesses would not have different production lines, but many already do. If you want to export to the Chinese, Indian or US market, you already have to meet the different standards they have. However, I readily accept his point about non-tariff barriers. He asked about the single market being an exercise in deregulation. I think that would come as a shock to many businesses that have to meet its standards. He talked about the £8 billion cost. Yes, the cost is considerable, but much of that expense would be incurred anyway. Even if we left with a deal, we would still incur the costs of leaving.

3.55 pm

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the civil servants and officials responsible for this document. Listening to the speeches from the

[LORD FORSYTH OF DRUMLEAN]

Opposition Front Benches, it is perfectly obvious that they have not read it. It is very helpful indeed. The only criticism I make of the Government is that they did not give us very long to read it, but I have read it. On page 46, for example, it makes it absolutely clear that pet owners will still be able to travel to Europe with their pets after Brexit. They may need to take additional steps to prepare but it explains what these are. The opposition parties are scaremongering and making the same speeches. They have demanded to know what would happen if we left, but when a document is produced all we get are the same tired old arguments that we have heard over and over again. I congratulate my noble friend and his officials on the fantastic piece of work that has been done in this document.

Lord Callanan: I thank my noble friend for his comments and join him in congratulating all the officials across government who are working on no-deal preparations. We have some excellent civil servants who are putting in a great deal of work to make sure that the country is prepared to honour the democratic decision the British people took to leave the European Union.

Lord Wigley (PC): My Lords, at lunchtime, the BBC news reported that Mrs Merkel is looking for a customs union element in Northern Ireland in order to find some common ground. Given that Mrs May's Government had that as a policy, and given the single market policy of the present Government, is it not possible to bring these together to find a compromise that can avoid us crashing out on 31 October?

Lord Callanan: The noble Lord makes a good point. We are seeking a compromise and have compromised considerably by conceding that Northern Ireland will remain aligned—part of the single market, effectively—for agri-foods and goods on the island of Ireland. We look to the EU to make similar compromises. No nation on earth has an internal customs border in its territory and it is unreasonable to expect the UK to do that.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, the Statement addresses the danger of dishonouring the referendum result, suggesting that 17.4 million people voted to end vast financial contributions to the EU and instead invest in people's priorities, such as the NHS—I seem to remember that being on the side of a bus—and our brave police service. Fine, those investments would be great, but in light of the IFS's suggestion today that a no-deal Brexit would lead to borrowing at levels not seen for 50 years and to our debt-to-GDP ratio rising to 90%, when will Her Majesty's Government stop dancing to the tune of the Brexit Party, the Spartans and Mr Dominic Cummings, and acknowledge that the financial costs of Brexit, especially a no-deal Brexit, will outweigh any financial contributions that we have been making to the European Union?

Lord Callanan: I accept that the Liberal Democrats are quite open about the fact that they want to dishonour the result of the referendum; if only the Labour Party would be more honest, we might have more of a debate on the subject. We have accepted that there will

be costs involved in honouring the referendum result and leaving the European Union. We are doing our best to mitigate those effects.

The Earl of Listowel (CB): My Lords, the Minister talks about risks as well as the efforts to mitigate them. What will the Government do to support households on low incomes, particularly low-income families, if food prices rise? Will they raise benefits to support low-income families should food prices rise significantly after a no-deal Brexit?

Lord Callanan: This is an area that we shall have to look at if there is a fiscal event organised by the Chancellor later this year. The economy, however, is in great shape: we have unemployment levels that the Labour Party would have been proud of if it had been in office, the lowest unemployment for 40 years and the strongest level of growth over the past few years—even since the referendum result that Labour was always telling us would be such a disaster. Many European countries would give their hind teeth for the UK's economic performance and unemployment levels.

Lord Bridges of Headley (Con): My Lords, while I welcome the nature of this report, and, like my noble friend Lord Forsyth, its comprehensive approach to these matters, I have a question about the reference on page 142 to the powers of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. My understanding is that the Northern Ireland Civil Service does not have all the powers required in the event of no deal. Will he confirm whether that is so, what the consequences are, and when the Government intend to address the situation?

Lord Callanan: We have been liaising extensively with the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and indeed—the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, will be pleased to know—with the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government. If we have any announcements to make on that, we will make them in due course.

The Lord Bishop of London: My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement. Will he confirm how many organisations are currently receiving funding for the asylum, migration and integration programmes via the responsible authority in the UK, and whether these will be placed at risk from a no-deal Brexit?

Lord Callanan: I do not have the figures for the number of organisations in front of me, but I will gladly write to the right reverend Prelate with them. But we have given guarantees to organisations receiving EU funding that they will continue to receive that funding after a no-deal exit.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): My Lords, with regard to security, page 154 shows that we are taking powers to ensure that, "Border Force Officers will have greater scope to refuse entry on the basis of criminal behaviour". How will they access real-time information about criminal behaviour in future?

Lord Callanan: One of the challenges of Brexit is internal security. We have done a huge amount of work on that behind the scenes. It is disappointing that the EU seems to be refusing to discuss many of those points with us, but we are, the noble Lord can be assured, putting in place all the appropriate mitigations so that we can still get access to much of this information.

Lord Hain (Lab): I echo the implication of the question from the noble Lord, Lord Bridges. Will the Minister confirm that no deal in respect of the Irish border will require direct rule, so that the necessary civil contingency arrangements can be put in place? There is no question that that is so, and I would be grateful if he confirmed it. Can the Minister also explain why he said one thing to your Lordships—it was also said by the Minister in the other place—on the question of a deal, while a No. 10 source is quoted in the *Guardian* online, just an hour ago, as my noble friend Lady Hayter indicated, following conversations with Chancellor Merkel and other leaders, including in Dublin, that a deal looks,

“essentially impossible, not just now but ever”?

Lord Callanan: With respect to the noble Lord’s first question, I will not go further than the answer I gave to the noble Lord, Lord Bridges. I take the point made by the noble Lords, but when we have announcements to make on such matters, we will do so in due course. I will not comment on off-the-record sources in the *Guardian*.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): Given that any delay would have to be decided collectively by the 28, I ask the Minister to answer a straightforward question: will the Government send a letter asking for a delay if 19 October arrives without a deal?

Lord Callanan: I have to give the noble Lord 10 out of 10 for persistence. We have been around this course a number of times. I will give him the same answer I gave in the debates and the Questions last week: the Government will of course abide by the law.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): Page 29 of the Government’s paper shows that British exporters would see price increases on 60% of the UK’s exports to the EU. It says that these include increased prices of 65% for beef, 53% for lamb and 10% for cars. The Government must have estimated the total value extra of British exports regarding price increases. What are they for those businesses exporting to the EU?

Lord Callanan: We have been very open about the fact that some of the sectors the noble Lord mentions face very real challenges due to the EU’s protectionist nature and the imposition of tariffs. We stand ready to help those sectors in a no-deal scenario and we have interventions ready to mitigate the worst effects of tariffs in those sectors.

Lord Marlesford (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend agree that for Northern Ireland to be outside the single market when Great Britain is inside it in no way infringes the constitutional position of Northern

Ireland as part of the United Kingdom? If he does so agree, could not exactly the same argument apply to the customs union?

Lord Callanan: I thank my noble friend for his question. The proposal we have put forward is for Northern Ireland to be aligned with the EU single market for agri-foods and industrial goods but not part of the customs union, but he makes an important point.

Lord Haskel (Lab): My Lords, under the heading “Harnessing Economic Opportunities”, the paper speaks of,

“a different approach to government procurement”.

What will this approach be? Is the idea that it will help UK companies? Will it incorporate British Standard 95009, a new standard that sets out the social and economic standards for public procurement? Is the idea of this to help UK companies? If so, how will that operate under WTO rules?

Lord Callanan: Of course we will always want to act in compliance with WTO rules, but the noble Lord will be well aware of the EU public procurement directives, which offer a very rigid and inflexible approach to public procurement. It is one of the many opportunities that we will be able to indulge in with smarter regulation but, of course, any proposals will be fully discussed in this House and the other place.

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, this has been a tortuous process, but there will come a point when we will need to rally around the flag. Does the Minister agree that the time will come to keep politics out of this process and that we will start accepting the practical reality of no deal and the subsequent consequences? As things stand, what shortcomings still require urgent attention, or are the Government satisfied with the level of preparedness as set out in Operation Yellowhammer?

Lord Callanan: The noble Viscount makes a good point. I am reminded of the famous quote that an independent is a guy who wants to take the politics out of politics. I am not sure that we will ever take the politics out of an issue such as this. Operation Yellowhammer is mentioned in the report. It comprises the reasonable worst-case planning assumptions that we are operating under. It is put forward by the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat, which operates under a strict set of guidelines. We are attempting to mitigate the effects against those guidelines.

Lord Caine (Con): My Lords, as somebody who has just finished a nine-year stint as an adviser in the Northern Ireland Office, I lend my support to the comments of my noble friend Lord Bridges and the noble Lord, Lord Hain. In the unfortunate event of no deal, it will be absolutely crucial that the Government take powers to provide for the control and direction of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and Northern Ireland government departments, and appoint additional Ministers to the Northern Ireland

[LORD CAINE]

Office to carry out and discharge those powers in the interests of the good governance of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Lord Callanan: My noble friend speaks on this subject with great authority. I entirely understand his point, but from his knowledge he will also understand why I cannot go any further than the answer I gave earlier.

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, this is a factual question, not a pejorative one. What is the Government's central estimate of the additional average time that it will take a lorry to pass through the channel ports from Dover to Calais, and what is their estimate of the economic cost of the delays that will result?

Lord Callanan: I am always suspicious when anyone gets up and says, "This is a factual question". The noble Lord knows very well that it is impossible to put numbers on these issues—it depends on a huge range of factors. If he tells me what the exact interpretation and application of the regulations will be by the French authorities, I may be able to get closer to an answer that he wants. Our job is to ensure that businesses and hauliers are well prepared. That is why we are investing so much in a huge public information campaign. One of the interesting statistics is that more than 80% of hauliers crossing the short straits are not British operators; they are mainly from other European countries. This is one of the reasons why we need to reach out to those countries, to haulage associations, drivers, organisations et cetera, to ensure that those organisations know the requirements and have the appropriate paperwork in place to ensure that there are no delays.

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, page 67 of the report, in the section on services, makes it clear that UK businesses and individuals operating in the EU will need to comply with host state rules, including on business travel, investing in and running companies, getting professional qualifications recognised and the levels of access to market. This may mean different regulations in every domain in which they operate. Can the Minister help me understand how this aligns with the Statement, which says that we will have, "autonomy over the rules governing our world-leading services sector"?

Lord Callanan: The noble Baroness is a doughty defender of the services sector, and rightly so; it makes an invaluable contribution to the UK. The distinction is that we will be able to regulate our own services sector, but the regulations that apply on exports in individual EU and non-EU countries are matters for those countries themselves.

Lord Wrigglesworth (LD): Given the IFS estimate that the economy is smaller by £60 billion as a result of the Brexit process, can the Minister tell the 60% of the electorate who did not vote for Brexit how much this whole exercise has been costing the United Kingdom since the Conservative referendum?

Lord Callanan: I think it was a UK referendum, not just a Conservative referendum. We are committed to honouring the result. I entirely understand the position of the Liberal Democrats: they want to forget about it and disavow the result, hoping that it will all go away. That is an offence against democracy, but I am sure that we will have this debate when it comes to the next general election.

Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab): My Lords, does the Minister accept that most people in this country will not share the indignation expressed by some noble Lords about the Government preparing for no deal, but will think that it is the obvious responsibility of the Government, while continuing to work towards a deal, to prepare for the contingency of no deal, which remains a very real possibility? Does he also accept that whatever the present intransigence of the Commission, the member states of the European Union will surely recognise that it is in their interests to work very closely and collaboratively with us on issues of security?

Lord Callanan: As always, the noble Lord makes very good points. Most people will of course accept that it is the legal default, and we should be preparing appropriately. I also entirely accept his other point. A lot of security co-operation takes place outside of the EU sphere, and we have been assured by the people responsible that that co-operation will continue, but of course, some security co-operation relies on access to EU databases et cetera. It is extremely disappointing that the Commission does not wish to discuss how we can better keep people safe in these areas.

Lord Morrow (DUP): My Lords, do not the comments of the German Chancellor to the Prime Minister—that Northern Ireland must remain in the EU customs union for ever—now reveal the true nature of both Dublin and the European Union? Furthermore, this demonstrates clearly what some of us have been saying for quite a while: that the backstop was intended to be neither temporary nor an insurance policy; rather, it was a device to remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom.

Lord Callanan: I have seen lots of these rumours flying around on social media, and I adopt the same policy as I do towards other off-the-record briefings. I have not seen an official read-out of that phone call, but I hope that those were not comments that the German Bundeskanzlerin would make. If that were the case, the noble Lord would be correct, in that it is unacceptable to have a customs border within the territory of the United Kingdom.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, I had understood that there was an additional 10 minutes of Back-Bench time on the Statement and it says 30 minutes on the screen. Would it be in order for this debate to continue?

Lord Callanan: I understood that it had been extended; I was not watching the clock. I am happy to stay and answer questions for as long as the House wishes, but it is for the Whips to determine.

Lord Bethell (Con): Yes.

Lord Callanan: I look forward to the noble Baroness's question.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: My Lords, I hope that the Minister would agree that, whether we leave the European Union with a deal or without one, we will need to have good relationships with our friends and colleagues in Europe in the future. That was implied in the question from my noble friend Lord Howarth. I do not agree with his views on Europe, but I do agree with him on that. Does the Minister think that last night's briefing from Downing Street to the *Spectator*, which has not been denied or repudiated since, is likely to encourage co-operative and fruitful relationships with our partners in Europe, particularly in the event of no deal? I very much hope we can avoid that, but I do not see much prospect of it at the moment.

Lord Callanan: Apparently there was a mix-up in communications, but I am happy to answer the noble Baroness's question. She made a good point in the first part of it: of course, we have to have good and friendly relations with European Union countries, both under the aegis of intergovernmental relations with the EU and bilaterally, and we are ramping up co-operation in embassies in order to do that. The reality is that there has to be a deal, whether that happens before our exit on 31 October or afterwards; it is not possible for us not to have a deal in our relations with the European Union. I totally agree with the noble Baroness on that point.

I cannot respond to all off-the-record briefings that appear on social media and elsewhere.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): In his Statement, my noble friend said that one of the opportunities of exit would be having our own seat at the World Trade Organization. What changes in policy does he expect to adopt as a result of us sitting alone at that table? Given the demise of the Trade Bill, how will Parliament and business be able to contribute to that important policy in future?

Lord Callanan: My noble friend makes a good point. We will want to be international champions for free trade, which is under threat in some parts of the world. The Trade Bill has not yet reached its demise; it is currently suspended and I hope there will be an opportunity to bring it back. On the more general point, we will want to consult closely with Parliament on our future trade relations.

Earl of Devon (CB): My Lords, the Minister stated that the no-deal mitigation plans for meat exporters are in place. Does this include the mass slaughter of livestock for which there is no longer an EU market, given the huge hike in tariffs? The chairman of the Heart of the South West LEP has said that the impact of a no-deal Brexit on agriculture in the south-west will be considerably worse than foot and mouth. Do the Government agree?

Lord Callanan: I answered a question earlier on this business and I fully accept that the challenges of a no-deal exit are particularly acute for various meat and

livestock sectors. We are aware of that, we are working closely with them, through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and we stand ready with a package of assistance to aid those sectors.

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, in reference to the reply that the Minister gave to the noble Lord, Lord Liddle, page 15 of the report says:

"The Government has prioritised the smooth and continued flow of goods in and out of the UK in the event of the UK leaving without a deal on 31 October 2019".

The Statement says:

"I want to pay particular tribute to the automotive, retail and transport sectors, including authorities at the Port of Dover and Calais, as well as Eurotunnel, for the extent of their Brexit preparations".

In view of the doubt the Minister expressed about the position in Calais, will he confirm that this Statement and report mean that traffic will flow smoothly through Dover and Calais in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

Lord Callanan: I can certainly confirm that traffic coming into the country will flow smoothly, because we have said we will prioritise flow over checking. We hope that the French authorities will adopt a similar position, but we are doing our best to alert drivers and others, on a reasonable worst-case scenario, about what delays may occur and to advise them to minimise those delays by turning up with the correct paperwork.

Lord Tomlinson (Lab): Does the Minister accept the judgment in the Scottish courts yesterday, where it appears that the judge argued that because he accepted the assurances given, both in writing and orally, by the Prime Minister or his aides at No. 10, there was no need to seek a declaration ordering the Prime Minister to honour the obligations that he appears to have entered into in Parliament? Does the Minister agree with the judge that it is now incumbent on the Prime Minister, therefore, to honour the requirements of the amendment, passed in this House originally, to give Parliament a meaningful vote, and also for Parliament to have the right to have the Benn Act taken fully into account?

Lord Callanan: We will abide by the law and of course we accept all court judgments.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, since we have this extra time, I ask my noble friend, in the midst of all this animosity, whether the United Kingdom is or is not, under international law and the 1993 treaty, as many legal authorities argue, still a member of the European Economic Area. If we were, that would obviously vastly ease the problem of deal or no deal and enable us to have an orderly transition and comply with all necessary aspects of the law.

Lord Callanan: My understanding is that when we leave the EU, we also leave the European Economic Area: we are members of that by virtue of our membership of the EU.

Lord Judd (Lab): The Minister stated with absolute certainty that the Government are convinced that when a narrow majority of the population voted in the referendum to leave, they did so for a number of

[LORD JUDD]

reasons listed in the Statement. What is the evidence that the majority of people voted for all these principles spelled out in the Statement? I have seen none. It is purely subjective, purely rhetorical and purely emotional. What is surely clear is that nobody, or very few people, can possibly have begun to understand in the referendum what all the implications and costs would prove to be. How can a Government committed to democracy and bringing the country together countenance going ahead with the course they have chosen without the people being given the opportunity to say whether they accept all these consequences or not?

Lord Callanan: I suspect that the noble Lord and I will not agree on this one. We think that the referendum result needs to be respected.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow (Con): My Lords, three and a half years ago, I was asked to put together a team from my old company, P&O, to cover every aspect of transport in every form by land, sea and air. On what is happening at Calais and Dover, Manston Airport will be used for the Dover-Calais runs, and the M40 will be used for the tunnel. One hour before the meeting this morning I was fully updated on the work that is being done. I assure my noble friend Lord Forsyth that what is shown in this document today is vastly advanced compared with how it has been for many years, and my compliments go to those involved. Most people want to come to an agreement—I hate the word “deal”—but if we do not, I reassure your Lordships that in practice, so much of what everybody is talking about today is to do with software, and many companies have already been set up to handle that. Can the Minister ensure that this is publicised? The software aspects of nearly everything we are involved in are the key to our success.

Lord Callanan: My noble friend makes some good points. We have put a huge amount of work in to make sure that traffic continues to flow freely through the Channel ports.

The Earl of Listowel: With the leave of the House, can I press the Minister a little further on the impact of a no-deal Brexit on low-income families in particular? I recognise the Government’s great achievement in achieving such a high rate of employment, but as a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children, I have been examining for several years the impact of the cuts in local authority funding on families with low incomes. Many of the essential services that support low-income families have been lost; they have carried a heavy burden through the years of austerity. Can the Minister please look carefully, as far as he can, at mitigating any adverse impact, particularly of possible significant food price rises?

Lord Callanan: I thank the noble Earl for his persistence in this matter. He is quite right to raise these important issues, and I commend the work he has done in this area. We will of course keep this matter under review, and will certainly look closely at any appropriate mitigations.

Syria: Withdrawal of US Troops Statement

4.27 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer to an Urgent Question asked in another place on the withdrawal of US troops from northern Syria. The Statement is as follows:

“We are in close consultation with the US on its response to the proposed Turkish military action in north-east Syria. The Foreign and Defence Secretaries both spoke to their US counterparts yesterday. The US position, including any movement of US troops, is a matter for the US Government. However, the US Department of Defense said in a statement yesterday that the US does not endorse a Turkish operation in north-east Syria. We have been consistently clear with Turkey that unilateral military action must be avoided, as it would destabilise the region and threaten efforts to secure the lasting defeat of Daesh. As members of the global coalition, our focus remains on securing the enduring defeat of Daesh. We will continue to work with the US and other international partners to that end”.

4.28 pm

Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab): My Lords, it has long been a concern that, due to Turkey’s veto, Kurdish representatives have been excluded from the Geneva and Astana peace processes, and are now excluded from the Syrian committee on constitutional reform. Will the Minister insist that in all future talks about Syria’s future, Kurdish representatives have a guaranteed seat at the table? Unfortunately, I understand that the US had not even notified the UN in advance of the decision to withdraw. In any contact that the Foreign Secretary has with our US allies, and indeed others, including the Turkish Government, will the Government ask that all parties engage through the proper international institutions?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, on the noble Lord’s second point, yes, of course we are making that point very clear. Indeed, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary spoke with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday, when the threats of a Turkish military incursion were raised as a serious concern. The noble Lord raised another valid point: the SDF has been a key partner in the defeat of Daesh and now, as we seek to bring stability to the region, we must stand by our coalition partners. We have not defeated Daesh yet—perhaps geographically we have, but the ideological base is very much still present.

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the Minister for his reply. Will the UK raise this at the UN Security Council? In this incredibly dangerous situation, will the Government provide any assistance, if necessary, to the Syrian Democratic Forces to enable it to maintain security at the seven camps that hold ISIS fighters? What assessment have the Government made of the impact of any further Turkish invasion of north-east Syria on UK military operations against ISIS and the security of British humanitarian organisations in the region?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Baroness and I often discuss this, both within and outside the Chamber. To put it on record and to be absolutely clear, first, we do not support the proposed Turkish action. We are working very closely with international partners. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary is seeking a call with the Turkish Foreign Minister in that respect. On support for the global coalition, the SDF continues to receive support. It has been extremely consistent and, indeed, integral to the defeat of Daesh. The gains made should not be lost.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, will the Minister tell the House what consultation took place from the US side with the British Government, given that we have resources deployed in that area? Secondly, it is not about whether it is the right of the Americans to withdraw their troops—of course it is—but whether we have made representations that we do not wish them to do that. Have we done that? Do we feel no shame at all that our principal ally is abandoning those who have died to enable us to defeat IS?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, first, as I said, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to Secretary of State Pompeo and relayed our concerns to him directly. We have also made very clear that we do not support any unilateral action by Turkey, which is also an ally. We will continue to work with our allies in the region, not only in support of what has been achieved on the ground but to bring stability to Syria as a whole.

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, the noble Baroness on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench was absolutely right to draw attention to the risk of the sudden release of ISIS prisoners, which could undo the huge gains achieved in recent years. Will the Government reconsider their policy on the widows and children of ISIS fighters, particularly those who originated from this country? Other European states have taken back some of their people; surely we should do the same.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the Government's position on foreign fighters has consistently been and remains very clear: those who have committed crimes should face justice for their actions. We have also been clear that foreign fighters should face justice in the most appropriate jurisdiction, which will often be the region where the crimes took place. I can reassure the noble Lord that we continue to work closely with all key partners in this respect, including on ensuring the safety and security of UK citizens as the Government's number one priority.

I am acutely aware—I had meetings to this effect on the margins of the UN General Assembly—of the issues the noble Lord raises about camps, including those in Syria. I understand that one camp currently holds up to 40,000 either combatants or families of Daesh. That is of deep concern. It is an issue not just for Syria or Iraq; there is a global challenge and we need to be ready to face up to it.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): What is the United Kingdom Government's long-term policy towards the Kurdish people? As we know, they were the one nation left after the First World War with no territory of their own. They are split among five nations, many in hostile environments. What is our long-term policy towards the Kurdish people, who have helped us so much in the fight against Daesh?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Wherever the Kurdish community is, we have continued to campaign and advocate for its important inclusion in any future settlement, whether in Iraq or Syria, which have made, as we have seen, certain gains—although recent events in Iraq have caused concern. We continue to ensure that all minority communities, whatever country they are in, including the Kurdish community, continue to receive vital rights of representation and are fully engaged and involved in all processes. As for immediate support, as I have indicated, the SDF has been part of the global fight against Daesh and remains an important coalition partner.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): I understand every word of the question, but I do not understand the answer. What is our policy towards the Kurds? Do we have no shame about betraying them now? Have we made any representations to the United States? Will we be making any representation to the Turks?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I challenge the noble Lord; I do not agree with him. It is not we who have made any declarations; it is the United States. It is entitled to make decisions of its own. The United Kingdom remains a committed partner to ensuring that we bring peace and stability to Syria. As I have said, we stand by the SDF and our Kurdish partners, in both in Syria and Iraq. That position is clear and I am not sure why the noble Lord is so confused.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): The noble Lord, Lord Kerr, asked what representations Her Majesty's Government are making to the Turkish Government as well. Clearly, the United States has a sovereign right to withdraw its troops, but Turkey remains a NATO ally. Do we not have some leverage to talk to Turkish leaders to try to ensure that their actions against the Kurds do not lead to any further reprisals, going beyond what is happening in Syria in any case?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the noble Baroness. She is quite right to say that Turkey is a partner in NATO. We provide continued support for many Syrian refugees who have taken refuge in Turkey, which has supported the Kurds and other refugees from Syria. We will continue to raise our concerns. On this specific issue, the rights of the Kurdish community—indeed, any minority community—should be part and parcel of any future settlement found in Syria, as we continue to campaign for greater stability, and in representation in Iraq.

Customs Legislation and Amendments: Impact Analysis *Statement*

4.37 pm

Lord Bethell (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I will now repeat, in the form of a Statement, the Answer given by my honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, to an Urgent Question in the other place. The Statement is as follows:

“Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am delighted to respond to the right honourable gentleman’s Question. The Government are devoting huge energies, as the Minister will know, to Brexit preparations. As the Prime Minister has stated, the Government’s preference is to leave with a deal, but, if necessary, without a deal, since it is so vital that we get Brexit done and move the country forward. The last thing businesses need is more uncertainty or delay. A key part of those preparations is to ensure that there is a functioning customs, VAT and excise regime on exit. To put the legal underpinnings in place, HMRC has laid 56 regulations to date following last year’s Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act.

To support the latest bunch of statutory instruments, debated by this House yesterday, the Government published a third edition of the overarching impact assessment of the movement of goods if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. This updates and builds on the previous versions of the impact assessment published in December 2018 and February 2018. The new version provides updates to cover the September 2019 regulations, including transitional and other arrangements for safety and security declaration requirements for the period after exit; further temporary customs and excise easements to extend the transitional arrangements after exit; further VAT-gathering powers to specify the type of information that can be collected from postal operators; and, finally, various technical amendments and transitional provisions.

As I said, our preference is very much for a deal, but the Government continue to make sure that this country is ready for no deal and that the impacts on businesses will be minimised as far as possible. That is why we have introduced a series of easements for traders moving goods in the UK, to take effect in a no-deal scenario. These easements—for example, our plan to simplify radically import processes for EU goods—mean that the costs identified in this impact assessment will be mitigated for UK importers. Crucially, the Government are also working to boost the long-term potential of the economy so that the United Kingdom can seize the opportunities that will exist for us outside the EU”.

4.40 pm

Lord Davies of Oldham (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for repeating the Statement. We have had a significant debate on Brexit under a number of headings this afternoon, and perhaps this one, the most precise of the lot, is likely to cause the most pessimism. This is HMRC indicating what will be the costs to business, and it has made it quite clear that the costs will be very significant.

Large companies importing and exporting in high volumes will face a cost of £28 for filling in the forms for each load imported, and this will take an employee on average one hour and 45 minutes. If the work is outsourced, HMRC estimates that the cost will rise to £56 for each consignment, based on the average charges of freight forwarders. This is HMRC getting down to nuts and bolts and being as accurate as it can—and it can only fill all involved in the health of our economy with considerable anxiety.

This of course is based on a no-deal Brexit. However, from the tenor of the discussions this afternoon in the House, it seems that there is a growing opinion that we are heading somewhat remorselessly towards no deal—or, to put it more accurately, none of us can see that any progress is being made towards an agreement with the European Union.

Left out of the analysis was any reference to the financial services industry. We cannot overestimate the significance of that industry to the overall health of our economy. So, although this is parlous as far as industrial goods and manufactures are concerned, we do not know the picture for a very significant part of our economy—and can only, therefore, I am afraid, be anxious about it.

What we are witnessing now is a process that reflects the failure of the Government, ever since they established their notorious red lines and made up their mind that they were going to set objectives that the European Union was unlikely to meet.

There is one additional feature on which the noble Lord did not make any comment. I do not blame him for that, because it is not directly related. Another aspect of a no-deal Brexit is that it is estimated by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that government debt will rise to its highest level for half a century. Bearing in mind that this takes into account the inevitable debt we ran into during the financial crash of 2008 to 2010, if this will be worse as a consequence of no deal, we can only yet again, I am afraid, tremble at the prospect, and at the same time redouble our efforts to ensure that the Government, even at this very late stage, strike a deal that is better than no deal.

Lord Bethell: I completely endorse the noble Lord’s sentiment. It is very much the Government’s policy to strike a deal and I, like others in the Government, very much hope that that will be successful. The Government’s efforts are very much focused on that objective.

Let me strike at the heart of the question. The noble Lord started by saying that this report articulates what will happen, but actually it articulates what may happen under very strict circumstances. I pay tribute to the officials who prepared such a detailed report for its transparency and integrity. The report in no way dodges or mitigates for several areas in which performance may be considerably better than the headline figures.

First, there are areas in which easement by British government policy will help improve performance. There are three of those easements: the delay in the submission of customs declarations, which we discussed last night; a period of grace to get a guarantee in place to cover additional duties; and the phasing-in of pre-arrival requirements for the entry summary declarations.

Secondly, we do not know what the EU will do to improve the situation and, thirdly, the behaviour of importers may introduce new efficiencies. With those in mind, I am hopeful that the headline figures may prove higher than those if a no-deal Brexit were ever to occur.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for speaking to me before Questions; I welcome that courtesy.

In its impact assessment, HMRC itself suggests that many of its assessments are cautious. This is an impact assessment just on the export of goods to the EU for UK bureaucracy; the £15 billion a year is on UK bureaucracy. As indicated, it does not cover exports of services or the likely reduced revenue to the UK Treasury from those extra business costs. It does not include any estimate of the additional bureaucracy costs to the recipient market in the EU. All those must together be marginally more than £15 billion, but—even if it were just the cautious £15 billion—that is massively more than any estimate the Prime Minister has made of the financial benefit to the UK of leaving the European Union with no deal at all.

As we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Callanan, after being pressed by me and others, the Government are working on a package of assistance to benefit the agricultural sector and for the new tariff regime that we will put in place. Indeed, as the readiness report said, there will have to be mechanisms for off-setting new VAT procedures for services and new procedures for VAT processes on parcels—not included in the impact assessment. What are the mitigation measures and what is their value? What is the emergency package that would be necessary for the agricultural sector and small businesses? The Government have not published any information in global sums about what those mitigation factors might have to be. Finally, what is the global cost to British businesses of the increase in tariff prices, in addition to this bureaucracy that HMRC is indicating?

Lord Bethell: The noble Lord makes very thoughtful points, but I remind him that the estimates in this report are a responsible, thoughtful and transparent effort to calculate the kind of costs that a no-deal Brexit might bring about. They cannot anticipate how the EU might respond, how tariffs might be negotiated or how a trade deal with the EU might affect those costs. With so many imponderables, it would be extremely difficult to tot up a large total of the kind he asks about. I am happy to ask officials whether there is some kind of arithmetic that can be done and to write to him with whatever they can come up with.

Rural Economy (Rural Economy Committee Report)

Motion to Take Note

4.50 pm

Moved by Lord Foster of Bath

That this House takes note of the Report from the Select Committee on the Rural Economy *Time for a strategy for the rural economy* (HL Paper 330).

Lord Foster of Bath (LD): My Lords, given the current political turmoil, it is tempting to confine my remarks to just one of the issues in our report that will have a huge impact on the rural economy, namely Brexit. While I can see no good news for the rural economy coming from Brexit, not least from a no-deal Brexit, I am sure your Lordships will be pleased that I shall avoid the temptation.

However, I am reminded of the story of the teenager who borrows his father's new car. When he returns he asks his father if he wants the good news or the bad news. The father asks for only the good news, so the son replies, "Well at least the airbag on your new Volvo works perfectly". There is certainly some good news alongside the bad in relation to the rural economy as your Lordships' committee, which I had the privilege to chair, discovered. It was set up in May last year with the wide-ranging task to,

"consider the rural economy and to make recommendations".

We published our report in April this year and the Government responded in July.

I am enormously grateful to the committee staff—Simon Keal, Katie Barraclough and Breda Twomey—and to our two special advisers Mark Shucksmith and Brian Wilson. I am also grateful to the Minister who throughout showed a close interest in the work of the committee. I am confident that he is as keen as the committee to get things done to support rural economies, so I hope he was pleased with our recommendation that his status in government be elevated. I am especially grateful to the talented team of Peers who served on the committee. The wealth of expertise of committee members in your Lordships' House should surely make any Government take their recommendations very seriously. My only claim to rural fame is living in a hamlet of eight people in deepest rural Suffolk, but our committee included a number of farmers, the former chair of the commission on the future of farming and the countryside and a former Defra Minister as well as the current chair of the Woodland Trust, the current president of the Countryside Alliance and the current chair of the Prince's Countryside Fund.

Of course our recommendations were significantly influenced by the evidence we received and by the visits we made. We took oral evidence from 60 individuals and organisations, received more than 200 written submissions and visited rural areas in Herefordshire and South Yorkshire. We quickly realised we should not talk about "the" rural economy—there are many different rural economies. Some are sites of innovation and creativity that, on some measures, outperform their urban counterparts. For example, rural businesses are more likely to report a profit and more likely to be successful exporters than their urban counterparts.

The first paragraph of our report begins:

"For many, rural England is a great place in which to live and work or to visit, with the countryside rightly regarded as one of our greatest assets. With a vast range of rural businesses and initiatives, and new sectors growing fast, rural economies are increasingly diverse, dynamic and vibrant".

That is the good news, the airbag working well, but the paragraph continues:

"But successive governments have underrated the contribution rural economies can make to the nation's prosperity and wellbeing. They have applied policies which were largely devised for urban

[LORD FOSTER OF BATH]

and suburban economies, and which are often inappropriate for rural England. This must change. With rural England at a point of major transition, a different approach is urgently needed”.

Inevitably our deliberations were wide-ranging. After all, a thriving rural economy depends on many factors: adequate and affordable housing and work places, decent broadband speeds and mobile coverage and access to finance, business support, skills and training as well as a fair share of funding for local services such as transport, policing and healthcare. No wonder our report is somewhat weightier than is normal for such documents.

Rurality brings special challenges in all those areas but we discovered that relatively little has been done to help rural areas address them. Often the policies—or lack of policies—of successive Governments have created obstacles, hindering the success of rural economies so that rural businesses contribute less per head to the national economy than urban businesses. There is a huge disparity between rural and urban service support. Support for rural public transport is far lower per head than for urban public transport, leaving rural areas increasingly car-dependent, despite 25% of rural people having no access to a vehicle or being unable to drive.

The formula that determines health funding currently transfers at least £1.3 billion away from rural areas and does not properly account for the additional costs of rural health provision. Rural areas receive almost 25% less funding per head for policing than urban areas. Average rural housing costs are nearly £90,000 higher than those in urban areas, excluding London, while average wages are 10% lower. Furthermore, rural areas really lose out in council funding. In this year’s settlement funding assessment grant, rural councils are getting 66% less per head than urban councils, and to make up the gap rural residents are paying around 20% more in council tax. No wonder our report called for urgent action, which is covered in nearly 100 recommendations to government and, in some cases, to other bodies such as councils and LEAs.

However, the first and central recommendation stemmed from our clear belief that at present rural policy is disjointed and badly prioritised by urban-oriented policymakers without due regard for rural interests. Therefore, just as the Government saw the need for an industrial strategy, we believe that they now need a comprehensive rural strategy, and we provide details on what we think it should look like to release unfulfilled potential and enhance the contribution that rural England can make to the whole nation while, crucially, retaining its distinctive character. To achieve this, we argue that the rural strategy must be linked to re-energised rural-proofing and a place-based approach to delivery, in which rural-facing LEAs step up their game.

Despite hearing some positive examples of rural-proofing, such as in the development of the industrial strategy, we also heard of major problems, including late timing, poor consultation, inconsistency of application and lack of transparency and accountability. There is clear room for improvement and we make recommendations on how this should be done, including the requirement of an annual report to Parliament on how departments have fulfilled their rural-proofing

responsibilities. In recognising the huge variety of rural economies, we stress that the rural strategy, and the policies that flow from it, must take these variations into account and ensure that local communities are fully engaged—hence our call for a place-based approach involving local people and organisations. Therefore, our three key proposals are interlinked and mutually supportive: a coherent rural strategy, re-energised rural-proofing and a place-based approach to delivery.

However, we have also made many recommendations on service delivery. For example, rural areas currently receive vital support from various EU schemes. If we leave the EU, similar help must be continued with, for example, the planned shared prosperity fund, including a dedicated funding stream to support rural economies. We argue for a fair funding review that ensures that local government and other service providers have enough funds to deal with rural challenges and the additional costs of rural service provision. We point out that connectivity is a major key to unlocking the potential of the rural economy. However, rural digital infrastructure has lagged behind in the past, so, while welcoming some of the recent very positive moves, we propose further measures to ensure that that is not the case in the future.

We also argue that affordable housing must be a priority. Only last week Sky News reported that the number of social homes being built in rural England has fallen by more than 80% in the last six years. Our report suggests that that is partly to do with government policies that too often disregard rural interests. For example, in most cases the NPPF prevents local authorities requiring affordable housing on developments of fewer than 10 homes, which are common in rural areas, so we propose a rural exemption. Moreover, knowing that since 2012 under the right-to-buy scheme, of every eight rural houses sold only one is replaced, we suggest that the right to buy in rural areas should be suspended or made voluntary. I am sure that noble Lords will refer to many other recommendations made in the report, from a review of rural rates relief to measures to maximise the benefits that the creative industries can bring to rural economies.

When our report was published, we were extremely heartened by the response to it. Organisations such as the Rural Services Network, CLA, ACRE, CPRE, the Rural Coalition, the Rural Housing Alliance and the National Rural Crime Network, were all extremely positive. Our key recommendation for the introduction of a rural strategy was especially well received. But, sadly, the Government’s response takes us back to the story of the new car and its functioning airbag. There are some positives and some good news. Perhaps the best is in relation to rural-proofing where the Government acknowledge that more can be done. The response talks of helping departments to develop a greater understanding, of publishing an evidence-based report on rural-proofing each year, and of establishing a rural affairs board to steer work on rural-proofing. We welcome all of this, but the response clearly illustrates that there is a long way to go. For example, we are told:

“DfE and DfT are currently preparing a joint proposal for discounted public transport for apprentices”.

I wonder whether the DfE and DfT yet realise that there is little or no public transport in many rural areas, so that is of no real help to rural apprentices and hardly evidence of good rural-proofing.

Even so, there is other good news. On tackling rural crime, we were encouraged that in the Prime Minister's proposals to increase police numbers by 20,000 he said specifically that the increase will focus in particular on underresourced rural areas, while the fair funding review appears to be moving in the right direction. There is support for our proposed community capacity fund to support local leadership and voluntary action but not, as we suggested, any government funding for it. In the area of boosting digital skills in rural SMEs, the trailblazer digital skills partnerships may well point the way forward. Even while our report was at the printers, we read that our desire to see re-established and re-invigorated Wheels to Work schemes may well be realised by the launch of a new national charity, W2W UK, to do just that.

We have heard warm words. Recently, the new DCMS Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan, said:

"Rural communities are a thriving hotbed of industry and technology and for them resilient digital connectivity is vital. They must not be forgotten as we continue to improve Britain's digital infrastructure".

There is some good news and some warm words, but not much.

Two years ago, the then Business Secretary, Greg Clark, said

"Some of the biggest economic opportunities are in the rural parts of the United Kingdom". [*Official Report*, Commons, 12/9/17; col. 631.]

We anticipated a very positive response from the Government to many of our key proposals, but much of it was disappointing. It acknowledges the importance of tackling challenges such as connectivity, housing, business support and transport, but largely just restates existing policies rather than committing to new ones. In some cases, such as the committee's call for landowners not to be held liable for the costs of clearing up fly-tipping, the Government simply dismiss our recommendations.

Most regrettable is the response to our proposal for a comprehensive rural strategy. While stating that the Government will,

"expand on its strategic vision",

for rural areas, they go on to reject the idea of a strategy. They claim that rural priorities can be delivered through local industrial strategies, thus avoiding the risk of,

"rural areas being placed in a silo through having a single rural strategy".

Several rural organisations wrote to the *Times* stating they were "deeply disappointed" by this decision. The Rural Services Network added:

"It shows not only a lack of government ambition for rural communities, but also a lack of appreciation of how strongly rural communities feel disconnected from government policy-making".

It says that the response is,

"missing the point and misrepresenting the purpose of a rural strategy".

Can the Minister explain why the Government claim that a rural strategy will create a silo for rural areas while at the same time agreeing to beef up rural-proofing?

I am clear that the scale of the challenges we identified cannot be remedied with sticking plasters, nor are commitments to promoting rural proofing meaningful without a clear strategic framework in which rural policy is made. I believe that the Government's response fails to engage with our key premise—that rural areas are distinctive and require a distinctive approach from policymakers.

All too often, the policies highlighted by the Government in their response are not rurally specific. This confirms our criticism that successive Governments have seen rural areas as an adjunct to urban areas, rather than as areas that need to be treated as separate and distinct, with specific challenges and priorities. As the letter to the *Times* says,

"overall the failure to put in place a robust and properly funded rural strategy constitutes a worrying missed opportunity and risks a continuation of the status quo ... Yet again the Government's attitude towards rural communities has left people feeling frustrated and ignored".

For too long, successive Governments have had a blind spot for rural economies. We now need more than an enthusiastic and supportive Minister. Whatever the outcome of the current political turmoil, we need all relevant departments and the Government as a whole to heed the words from the Countryside Alliance in its briefing for today's debate:

"It is now time for the Government to move away from one size policy fits all and sit up and listen to the voice of rural Britain."

I beg to move.

5.06 pm

The Earl of Caithness (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, for his very good chairmanship of the committee. He had a diverse group of Peers with different interests to handle, but we all managed to come up with a report with which we agreed unanimously. I also thank our clerk and his staff, as well as the two special advisers, Mark Shucksmith and Brian Wilson, for their support.

Examining the rural economy was a huge and diverse remit, possibly too big for the structure and timetable imposed upon us. Our report makes recommendations for not only the Government but various other organisations, as appendix 8 makes clear. I wish to focus on our main recommendation for the Government, which is also the title of our report: *Time for a Strategy for the Rural Economy*.

I have never sat on a committee where so many—often positive—policy changes by different departments were announced during our consideration. That these were not co-ordinated merely confirmed the overwhelming evidence we received that a strategy for how land is used is essential for understanding change in a multifunctional landscape. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have spatial policies to take stock of land use, setting out a vision for how the country could make better use of land, whether for development, farming, energy, recreation, conservation or other uses. It is long overdue that England should have one too.

We are not the first to recommend such to a Government, nor will we be the last. We had high hopes that the Government would be more sympathetic

[THE EARL OF CAITHNESS]

this time, especially after the very good evidence session that we had with the previous Secretary of State and my noble friend Lord Gardiner, but no—the same negative and disappointing reply was forthcoming.

Does my noble friend the Minister agree that the recently published Glover report on national parks only adds to our arguments? It states that:

“There is no common ambition and a culture which has neither kept pace with changes in our society nor responded with vigour to the decline in the diversity of the natural environment”.

I agree. I would merely extend the criticism to the rural economy. A quarter of England is already covered by national landscapes. If the Government implement the Glover recommendations, with the extra costs, at a time when government borrowing is expected to rise to levels last seen in the 1960s if we leave the EU without a deal, I fear for the rural economy in areas outside the national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. They will suffer disproportionately and become increasingly neglected without a rural strategy.

While on the subject of landscapes, there is a concern that the focus on climate change and net zero, welcome though it is, may override other policy objectives such as biodiversity and agriculture productivity. Does my noble friend the Minister agree that the key is to consider mitigation strategies across the land management system rather than dramatic landscape transformations resulting in changes to ecological balance that affect biodiversity? Can he also tell us how he sees the role of agroforestry in meeting woodland planting objectives?

The evidence we took on rural-proofing merely confirmed that which we had received in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Select Committee a year earlier. It is still not working satisfactorily. It is nearly 20 years since the recommendation that rural-proofing should be formally established. Therefore, I wonder if “congratulations” is the right word in response to Defra finally setting up a rural affairs board of senior civil servants from various departments. This is just not enough. What Whitehall needs is the enthusiasm and vision of my noble friend the Minister. It needs to bring that focus both at the early stages of policy development and during implementation of those policies, because rural-proofing is an ongoing process.

We made other recommendations. I move quickly on to broadband and have just one question for the Minister. Does the Prime Minister’s commitment to deliver full broadband to every home in the land by 2025 still hold good? Recent announcements seem to weaken that promise.

Crime is a key issue for rural communities and is growing rapidly. It is also underreported in rural areas, as confidence is low in the ability and willingness of the police to solve a crime. Does the Minister agree that fear of crime has a debilitating effect on the quality of life, and that the number of people worried about becoming a victim of crime in rural areas is twice that of those in urban areas? This needs attention.

I turn next to local enterprise partnerships. I am sorry that the noble Lord, Lord Curry of Kirkharle, is unable to take part today as he would wax much more

lyrical than me on our concerns about them. Clearly, most are not taking the rural economy into consideration in the way that they should. It is all very well to say that they must work with local authorities but, as their boundaries are often not coterminous, there are in-built difficulties from the start. With 25% of all registered businesses in rural areas, the Government will have to ensure that some LEPs revise how they work.

Finally, I turn to rural services, which the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, also covered. These are the glue which hold communities together and thus play a more significant social role than in towns and cities, yet they are in more comparative decline than in urban areas. As he—our chairman—said, this needs addressing urgently to rectify the balance.

In conclusion, I come back to where I started. We appreciate that Defra is nearly submerged by the very pressing problems and opportunities of Brexit, especially if it is with no deal. I ask the Minister to think again about the need for a rural strategy; this would be the basis for all subsequent decisions, which could be taken in a much more coherent and satisfactory way than has been the case to date.

5.13 pm

Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab): My Lords, it was both a pleasure and a privilege to serve on this committee, so ably chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Foster, whom I warmly congratulate. I pass my sincere thanks to my fellow committee members for their wisdom, insight and experience, and for the fun we shared. My thanks also go to our very able clerk, Simon Keal, and his colleagues, and to our excellent specialist advisers, for their wonderful servicing.

The visits that we made out of London were challenging for the staff to organise but they did an exemplary job, and those visits were particularly informative and helpful to our deliberations and eventual conclusions. I was very pleased to visit my home county of Herefordshire and see some of the innovative work going on there, although my local contacts—especially in my role as patron of Herefordshire Carers Support—give me grave concern about the resources available to the local authority to support the health and care needs of their population.

The ageing population and rural health services were a particular concern to me and to some other members of the committee. Our strong recommendation was that the higher than average age of rural dwellers, which is of course increasing, should be reflected in policy and funding allocations, especially in view of the additional costs associated with things such as transport in rural areas. The availability of staff is an issue too, particularly those on low wages. Very few health and care workers will be able to afford a house in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Rural people understand that they will never have a major general hospital in every market town, but they should not be further disadvantaged by their rurality and asked to accept inequity of access to facilities by thoughtlessness—simply assuming access, as many agencies do—or deliberate use of resources to service only those in urban areas because these services are easier to plan. Loneliness and isolation must also be

taken into account, especially where mental health in rural areas is concerned. I hope the Minister will confirm that the Government will take steps to support rural mental health more widely.

The title of our report indicates, as have other Members, that we discussed the issue of a rural strategy widely, and we very much hope the Government will follow our recommendations on this. We had most valuable contributions from our many excellent and knowledgeable witnesses and notably from Action with Communities in Rural England. I must declare an interest as my husband chairs this organisation. Its analysis helps us conclude that rural people are not some kind of exception, to be thought about only after we have made the major decisions for our society with cities and towns in mind. Some 17% of the UK's population live in rural areas and they enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as anyone else; they must be thought about as part of the whole. That is why ACRE believes that nobody from a rural area should be unreasonably disadvantaged by where they live.

Living in a rural area may be a choice for some, and I am one of those for whom it is a very welcome choice. However, it should never be considered just a lifestyle choice for anyone. Beautiful surroundings are less of a privilege when low incomes and disadvantage mean you cannot access the necessities of life or when your family have had to move away for jobs and income and are therefore unable to care for you when you are unwell.

When it comes to the complex and sophisticated requirements of a modern society, rural residents require public administrators and politicians to be innovative about how access is created for them. We know that solutions to the problems facing society will become increasingly dependent on digital hyper-connectivity. It is essential that rural areas are enabled to play a full part in these solutions, as well as benefiting from truly nationwide digital initiatives. Public investment in these must be assessed on an appropriate long-term basis, with equity for rural people firmly in mind. As one who had to make 87 separate phone calls to get broadband established, I feel that very strongly.

The issue of connectivity, whether for business or social purposes, came up time and again, and other committee members will cover this with more expertise than I can. Any assumption that people can access everything online is dangerous. If you live in a rural community, you are constantly reminded that the delivery of the parish magazine on paper by someone on foot is still very important.

I hope that our call for a strategy emphasises that we have been too prone to see rural and urban issues as separate. While acknowledging, as my noble friends have, the distinctive nature of our rural areas, we must acknowledge that the urban and rural parts of the English regions are much more interdependent than we have perhaps realised. As far as the economy is concerned, food production, waste management, the provision of clean water, flood prevention and so on are all interlinked, as the Minister has often acknowledged. I hope he will confirm that in his response tonight. Public investment must reflect this interdependence and ensure a fair future for all a region's residents, both urban and rural.

5.19 pm

Baroness Humphreys (LD): My Lords, I add my thanks to our chair, clerks, advisers, the expert witnesses who appeared before us—and especially to the community members who hosted our committee's visits. Mainly, however, I thank my fellow Peers for their collegiality on the committee.

Like our chairman and others who sat on the committee, I am disappointed that the Government have declined to accept our recommendation that they initiate a rural strategy to outline the future they see for rural communities. As committee members and advisers analysed our evidence-taking sessions and examined documents we had received, we concluded that the Government's present reliance on policy priorities leads to inconsistencies in delivery as current priorities are inevitably replaced by others.

Calling for a government strategy is, I believe, appropriate. We set out our definition of such a strategy as, "an over-arching framework document which would set out the Government's vision, aim and objectives over a multi-year period". Such an approach would allow government departments to feed into the framework and, crucially, would provide the long-term certainty that our rural areas need.

I will highlight three issues. The first has already been referred to by our chair. One of the most common complaints we heard in our witness sessions was the lack of consistency in the quality of the rural-proofing process at both government and local levels. This was highlighted for me when, earlier this year, I paid a visit to Bishop's Castle in Shropshire and was fortunate to meet the pupils and staff of the community college there. The college is a highly successful rural LEA secondary school situated in the idyllic countryside of the Long Mynd in the south of the county. Last year it was failed, probably as a result of the law of unintended consequences. Nevertheless, it was failed.

Since the 2014-15 financial year, the college had received sparsity funding of £100,000 per annum, the maximum allocation available, but for the 2018-19 financial year changes to the funding formula were introduced. The maximum allowance was reduced to £60,000 per annum, and schools with more than 300 pupils on roll suddenly found that this was to be reduced on a falling pro rata basis. The consequence was that the school's allowance was reduced by £66,200 to £33,800—a massive drop in income for a school of this size. In the words of the head teacher, "the formula just doesn't support rural schools". So much for rural-proofing. It also begs the question: what is the Government's strategy for rural schools? How do they ensure that policies or formulae that support rural schools cannot be changed to the detriment of the very schools they were designed to help?

My membership of your Lordships' Rural Economy Select Committee coincided with news of the closure of the last bank in the small market town where I live, and it became obvious that access to cash would be a burning issue for our rural community in north Wales, as it is for many communities throughout the UK. It is an issue that the committee took very seriously. Throughout the UK, many of our shops, cafés and other businesses still deal only in cash, and many

[BARONESS HUMPHREYS]

people prefer to use cash for small transactions. Indeed, there are up to 1.2 million people in the UK who do not have access to a bank account.

Access to cash is only one side of the coin: cash circulating in a community needs to be deposited by businesses. The Post Office, as it has done in many communities, has stepped in to fill the gap. I certainly welcome the co-operation between the Post Office and the UK high street banks, which led to the establishment of the banking framework in 2017 and which has enabled customers to carry out day-to-day banking at Post Office branches. I welcome their commitment to banking framework 2, which will see a significant increase in the fees paid to the Post Office by banks for processing transactions.

The coalition Government began a programme to maintain and modernise the Post Office network in 2010 and I welcome and acknowledge the £2 billion that Governments have committed since then, but could the Minister assure me that there will be continued government investment in the maintenance and modernisation of the network? What strategy are the Government intending to put into place to ensure the future of post offices in our rural areas?

As a committee, and as individuals within it, we are very aware of the problems of loneliness and social isolation in rural areas. I was particularly impressed by the scheme we heard about when we visited Fownhope in Herefordshire. Its compassionate community scheme has 18 companions, who make weekly or fortnightly visits to those who need company and support, based on referrals from the local medical centre. These visits help reduce hospital visits, encourage sociability and combat isolation.

One of the major contributory factors to rural social isolation is the worsening situation regarding rural transport. Indeed, in many areas the rural transport system has virtually collapsed. The system in Wales is no exception. Rural areas throughout the UK have similar problems, but devolution allows the devolved Administrations to tackle problems in a different way or at different paces.

Earlier this year, the Welsh Transport Minister announced £1 million of funding for pilot projects that, together with Transport for Wales, will test innovative forms of demand-responsive bus travel across Wales. Conwy County Borough Council, where I live, was one of the three project winners and the county will stage a three-year trial based on the Conwy valley area, aiming to give those who live in a six-mile radius of Llanrwst, our market town, access to all our facilities. It is an exciting project that, if successful, will see demand-responsive transport available to everyone, whatever their age, free for those with bus passes and £1 per journey for others.

The Chancellor's recent infrastructure funding announcement that a national bus strategy will be initiated in England begs the question: why cannot the rural element of that strategy for buses contribute towards a rural strategy framework document covering all the issues that the committee has raised?

5.28 pm

The Lord Bishop of London: My Lords, you may well ask what the Bishop of London is doing adding her voice to a debate on our strategy for the rural economy. Despite having spent most of my adult life in London, my five years in the West Country and latterly as the Bishop of Crediton in Devon demonstrated to me the challenges of rural life. I also know how, as a country, the strength of our economy as a whole is interrelated with the rural economy. The World Bank has said that the rural environment is often the country's "growth engine", and, particularly relevant in the light of this week's events,

"the food supply and the rural population are custodians of the environment and ecosystems".

As co-chair of the All-Party Group on Rural Health, I am grateful for the excellent work of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy. I thank it for its hard work. I also support the need for rural strategy to be taken seriously by the Government.

As already indicated in this debate, the rural economy has its roots in many interrelated aspects, IT, education, healthcare and transport being four. If we want a strong rural economy, we need to ensure that strong infrastructure is in place. The report comments on the need for strong IT infrastructure. With more people working at home in our rural communities than in our urban centres, and with the increased need for digital health, the rollout of broadband is essential. Where there should be hot-spots, rural-proofing reveals that there are not-spots. Cornwall is much better for digital access than where I was in Devon. Why? Because of EU funding in Cornwall.

When I was in Devon, I saw the challenge of maintaining quality education and healthcare when the road infrastructure in some areas was so difficult. Ensuring the recruitment and retention of teachers, nurses and doctors depended as much on transport accessibility as it did on the quality of organisations. I have been encouraged over recent months by campaigns to encourage people to train as nurses. Primary school children have access to mini nurses' uniforms. Apprenticeships and cadet schemes have been introduced, but more could be done to tailor these to rural communities. Three avenues that I believe should be explored further are direct entry into community nursing courses, just as we have direct entry into midwifery; increased distance learning for healthcare professionals; and improving the understanding of the nature of rural healthcare within our training organisations.

We must also be honest. In some of our more isolated rural communities, providing healthcare and education will cost more than providing the same service in our urban centres. Yet the report highlights that despite the population in rural areas being older, there is less spending per head of population on healthcare. Yes, this is good investment, because it contributes to our rural economy, but fundamentally it is a mark of our Christian hospitality to seek to include all of society in its flourishing.

I also welcome the Government's commitment to the role of volunteers in building community life. The church continues to be at the very heart of the rural community, often there after the post office, the bank,

the library and the pub have left. There are over 10,000 Church of England churches in Defra-defined rural areas. Many who go to church are also involved in other activities in their communities. This makes a real difference to the whole vibrancy of place. As part of our evidence for this report and written submissions, the Church highlighted the importance of our community action, our buildings and the Church's involvement in social enterprise. In its 2018 survey, the Rural Community Action Network found that of the rural parishes surveyed, 80% were involved in running community events; 65% provided lunch clubs or similar activities for older people; 31% had community cafes; 49% offered a parent and toddler group; 17% provided activities for people with dementia; and 23% had active youth work. All of these contribute to the rural economy.

We have also extended the use of our church buildings. For example, St Giles, Langford, in the diocese of Chelmsford, turned its vestry into the village shop, without significant adaptation of the rest of the building. St Mary the Virgin, Stannington, in the diocese of Newcastle, adapted its buildings to create a community meeting space and an IT room, much needed by the local community. The Arthur Rank Centre and the Plunkett Foundation found that social enterprises in churches make a significant contribution to the provision of the much-needed services in rural communities, as well as improving the sustainability of the building itself.

I am pleased that in their response, the Government illustrated their support for rural communities through their investment in the Plunkett Foundation, which supports the development of rural community businesses owned and run by residents. I also welcome the Government's expressing an interest in working further with the foundation to host community businesses. Can the Minister explain what practical help the Government intend to provide it with to take this work forward?

Additionally, what is the Minister's response to some of the issues that I have outlined, specifically on the Government's commitment to increasing community-driven digital infrastructure in rural areas to help bridge the digital divide; improving transport links in these areas; and taking into account geographical factors in healthcare funding differentials?

Given the level of complexity, it is clear that a strategy for the rural economy is a cross-government agenda. As such, I welcome the promise made in the Government's response that Defra will produce an annual evidence-based report on rural-proofing, which is taking place across departments. I hope the Government will confirm that this report will include evidence of rural-proofing in LEPs' industrial strategies and give a clear indication of when the first report will be published.

I am grateful that this report highlights the need for a comprehensive approach. I hope it proves a catalyst for the policy changes that are desperately needed to ensure the flourishing of our rural communities, for the benefit not just of the rural economy but the country as a whole.

5.36 pm

Lord Haselhurst (Con): My Lords, I salute the noble Lord, Lord Foster, and his colleagues, for their work in producing this mammoth report. I was struck by the range of organisations that impinge on the rural economy and the host of funding bodies that have been created for particular reasons. That the acronyms occupy three and a half pages of the report gives an idea of the complexity involved.

However, defining a rural economy these days is becoming more difficult. The noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, referred to this. It seems to me that we are in a more mobile society, where the differences between certain urban and rural areas are starting to break down. There is an obvious division between the rural areas which are in the hinterland of our major cities and those which are not. To refer to the example of Uttlesford District Council, which I had the honour of representing in the other place for a number of years, if you fly over that district, you will see vistas of barley and wheat, and it is still designated as a hugely rural area. However, the operative word is "fly", because most of the people who fly over Uttlesford are flying in and out of London's third airport, which is situated in that district and has had a major impact.

Therefore, I am wary of having a single strategy for the rural economy. The Government must have an overall strategy for the country—notably to help cure the north-south divide, but also, I would also argue, the east-west divide that we have—but I favour the strategic plans being formed at a more local level. The question we have been thinking about for decades is just how local that should be. There is a danger that the units created could be too big or too small. I do not think we have got it right yet.

There is also an advantage in having some recognisable uniformity in the structure created. Otherwise, there is a patchwork quilt of authorities and not everybody recognises to whom to turn for their services and the advocates they need. A degree of uniformity in structure would help the transfer of best practice. We talk about that a lot, but we are not very good at doing it in this country. I may be sticking my neck out, but I have become attracted to the format of a mayor-led combined authority. These are early days, but there is some merit in the direction we are going in. The noble Earl, Lord Caithness, referred to coterminosity. I am glad I was not the first person to mention that word. It would be helpful if we could try to ensure that everything is contained within whatever unit of government we are looking at.

I am not sure whether the business input should come from LEPs. They are not coterminous to a great extent. Could we have a much more effective network of chambers of commerce, as they do notably in Germany? It would help if all other stakeholders could similarly be brought within the circle. This might help to bring in more private finance than at the moment, when businesses are uncertain whether to commit themselves. It might be argued that larger authorities, of the kind we have seen pioneered in certain parts of the country, are taking power from the people, but I

[LORD HASELHURST]

do not accept that argument. You could perfectly well delegate day-to-day responsibilities to parish councils—either singly or combined—much more than at present.

We have to get away from a culture of resistance to change, which is enveloping more and more of our communities. Change has to be packaged in an attractive way. At the moment, it seems to have too many negatives in the eyes of the population. To use the example of Uttlesford District Council again, after nearly four decades of argument—I was part of it—it became the home of London's third airport. For all that that has become the district's biggest employer, since its inception there has still been no railway upgrade between the airport and the capital city or branching out more to the north and the east. The dualling of the A120 has not yet been completed, despite my being assured, in 1977, that it was one of the key arteries to bring transport from the east coast ports to the Midlands and the north. Yet we are now flirting with the idea of an Oxford-Cambridge link. We might be better off completing the A120 first, as our contribution to east-west healing, rather than embarking on that wholly new idea.

We are seeing redundant farm buildings occupied by high-tech companies. People are migrating into the area, because they want somewhere nicer to live and to fill the many jobs being created. There is an acute housing need, but this is resisted by the population who fear that the consequences will make matters worse than they are at present. There is sufficient evidence that that is the case.

Like everyone else, I cannot avoid using the word, "digital". There is a growing anger over poor or non-existent digital connectivity. Fewer people may live in rural districts, but they have exactly the same needs as those who live in the towns and cities. There is no clarity on when fibre will come. When David Cameron was Prime Minister, he talked of it being made a universal service obligation. The fact is that in many parts of rural England there is no universal service obligation in the provision of mains drainage or private water supply. We have a long way to go in some areas.

A neutral person, coming upon this country's situation, might conclude that we have somehow muddled along in the way we have approached local or devolved government. We have done it in a way that has created more anger and frustration than satisfaction. Fresh thinking and dynamic leadership are required if we are to unite communities behind bold action. I agree with the authors of the report that the time has surely come.

5.45 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I commend the Rural Economy Committee on the strength of this report, and the noble Lord, Lord Foster, for calling this debate. However, I am also disappointed, not with the report, but with its finding that,

"successive governments have underrated the contribution rural economies can make to the nation's prosperity and wellbeing".

The Government's recent response to this report reinforced my disappointment, in that it rejected a key recommendation of the report that a comprehensive

rural strategy is needed. I hope that, in his reply to the debate, the Minister will set out more clearly the Government's strategy and vision.

There have been a number of recent reports on the rural economy, from this House and the other place, to say nothing of the many interest groups and scholars who regularly conduct and publish research on issues relating to rural life. These reports all reinforce the analysis in the noble Lord's report of the importance of the rural economy, the challenges it faces and its vast potential. None of these three things can be in doubt. The overwhelming majority—over 90%—of land in England is rural. Nearly 10 million people live in rural areas, and they contribute £246 billion to the economy. The noble Lord, Lord Foster, reminded us that the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said, only recently, that, "some of the biggest economic opportunities are in the rural parts of the United Kingdom".

For many, to think of England is to think of rural land. It is vital that we in this House keep our rural communities front and centre in our deliberations, to support them in overcoming the challenges they face. They certainly do face a set of challenges, distinct from our urban communities. The committee's report describes many of these. They face problems of physical connectivity, in the form of poor and irregular public transport. They face problems of digital connectivity, with slow broadband speeds making it frustratingly difficult to take an active role in the digital world. Of particular interest to me, they face a shortage of affordable housing. I declare an interest as the chair of the National Housing Federation.

Housing affordability, or lack of it, is not unique to rural areas. Many of the root causes are the same as those being experienced by all our communities: the high price of land; underresourced local authorities navigating a planning system in need of reform; and the need for greater funding for social housing. These are all issues which, in the long run, it is in the Government's gift to resolve. It is vital for smaller towns and villages across England that the Government do resolve them. While the root causes may be the same, their impact is felt more acutely by our rural communities, and particularly by younger generations. Young people struggle to afford to live in these areas and choose instead to move to more affordable urban communities. The knock-on effects on our rural communities are made clear in the report. Rural businesses lose potential workers and customers of the future; public services become less sustainable; and our buses have fewer passengers as our schools and hospitals face recruitment crises. The community as a whole loses some of the vibrancy associated with different generations living side by side.

The lack of affordable housing is driving these issues at just the time when our rural communities should be experiencing a renaissance. Modern technology presents a fantastic opportunity for towns and villages across England, as a greater number of companies embrace new ways of working. The flexibility given by virtual working gives us a unique opportunity to create a sustainable environment in which geography is no barrier to achievement. Soon it will be the norm for workers to have a real choice about where they live

and build their lives, unconstrained by physical proximity to a workplace. Rural economies should be beneficiaries as these new practices become standard, but the growing unaffordability of housing risks squandering the opportunity that technology presents.

Our rural communities are already valuable contributors to the national economy, but they want to do more. They seek to overcome the challenges imposed on them by lack of affordable housing. Housing associations are at the forefront of this activity, working with communities and residents to make rural communities more sustainable. Through such partnerships, we now have such organisations as the Rural Housing Alliance—a coalition of rural housing associations sharing innovation, good practice and ideas. Its rural housing pledge presents a set of commitments to work with rural communities delivering good quality, well-designed homes that prioritise local people in housing need. But as this report finds, there is more to be done if we are to unlock the true potential of rural economies.

We need to ensure that we have the right skills, now and in the future, to build the homes we need. We need to support emerging technologies relating to construction and design, not least modern methods of construction. We need greater levels of funding to deliver homes for affordable and social rent. In particular, we need a planning system that supports the delivery of suitable affordable housing, and local authorities with the resources to facilitate it. By their very nature, many rural schemes are small, and this can lead to them not getting the priority and attention of larger schemes. This is a mistake, because a small number does not mean a small impact when it comes to rural affordable housing. I give the example of west Dorset and the village of Toller Porcorum, where residents have lost their local pub and shop. In 2015, their post office was similarly under threat. Residents worked with the housing association Aster to build six new homes for affordable rent and in the process provided a new, sustainable site for the post office. A vital community hub was kept open thanks to a development of six homes.

That is just one of many examples demonstrating how tackling the issue of affordable housing in our communities can empower the rural economy and make villages and towns sustainable, but so much more could be done with the right government support. So does the Minister agree that we have a duty to support our rural economies? Does he agree that the Government must take action to support the delivery of affordable homes, whether in rural or urban areas? Like others, I urge the Minister to reconsider the need for a strategy. I hope, perhaps above all, that he will re-energise the rural-proofing process, to ensure that all domestic policies take account of rural circumstances and that the needs of the 9.5 million people in rural communities are reflected in government policy and legislation.

5.53 pm

Lord Greaves (LD): My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Foster on the scale and ambition of this work, which will surely go on people's shelves for years to come as a reference work when it comes to the economies of rural areas. Having said that, I think that some of it has a slightly old-fashioned approach,

and I will explain why in a minute. The noble Lord, Lord Haselhurst, talked about how much of the countryside now looks rural but, in terms of its function, is actually quite urban. This is absolutely true. I was musing, as somebody who can remember that dreadful night when Grace Archer died in the fire, that in those days "The Archers" was genuinely about countryfolk. Nowadays, a great deal of it is about middle-class people who live in the countryside. That is a symptom of the way the countryside has changed.

Much of this report seems to be based on the urban functions of the countryside and it misses out quite a lot about geography and the environment, which are different from urban areas, and the things that really make the countryside different. I was looking back on previous debates we have had on these matters in your Lordships' House and came across the debate on agriculture, fisheries and the rural environment on 2 November 2017. I discovered that during that debate I quoted some of the things that the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, had said slightly earlier in the debate. I thought, "These are very sensible. I will quote them again". Then I discovered that he is to speak immediately after me, which makes it a very dangerous thing to do—he might stand up and say he has changed his mind since then, but I do not think so. I might be making part of his speech for him, I do not know, but what he said was that:

"Any vision for our countryside has to include agriculture, the environment and rural communities. They are all interlinked ... what is our countryside for? There are services that society will want to buy from our land managers: landscape, improved access opportunities for leisure and health and greatly improved diversity of habitats and species",

as well as farming economy and the rest. He spoke about the need to "create more diversified jobs", including tourism, partly to help farmers,

"and their households ... survive on the land".—[*Official Report*, 2/11/17; col. 1447.]

I do not see a lot about this relationship in this report.

I want to speak a little about rural tourism, particularly outdoor activities and recreation. In that same debate I talked about the organisation Walkers are Welcome, which I paid tribute to and which is still going strong, I think. I talked about the detailed outdoor survey from the British Mountaineering Council—I declare an interest as a patron—in 2015-16 about just what people do in the countryside and how much more it could contribute to rural economies. In February 2017, an excellent report, *Reconomics Plus: The Economic, Health and Social Value of Outdoor Recreation*, from Manchester Metropolitan University set out a whole series of statistics. There are 3.2 billion visits by adults to the great outdoors, of which over half are to the countryside—plus, of course, visits by children, for whom it is so important. Some 1.31 billion went to the countryside and 456 million used pathways, cycleways and bridleways. I remind the House of the Question for Short Debate I tabled two or three months ago about the cut-off date in 2026, which is causing a great deal of worry for a lot of people who are working hard to claim historic footpaths and bridleways. It is something I shall come back to and I hope that the Government will come back to it, to put that deadline back, at least.

[LORD GREAVES]

In 2015, £2.6 billion was spent on outdoor activities in Great Britain. Obviously, a lot of that was spent in the countryside. There were 250 million day visits in Great Britain which involved outdoor activities, of which 113 million visits had outdoor activities as their single main activity. One key issue we have talked about in various debates in your Lordships' House is the need to work together, to integrate and to prevent the conflicts that can easily arise, some being conflicts between people going to do outdoor activities, et cetera, in the countryside and people using the land for other purposes, notably for agriculture. There are also conflicts between catering for local needs—the needs of people already living there—and the needs of people who want to go and live there.

My noble friend talked about the importance of allowing rural councils to decide whether to have right to buy or not. I remember, back in 1974, when I had become the chairman of the housing committee of the new Pendle Borough Council, that there were two rows of nearly derelict old water board houses in the village of Barley. One thing I managed to do was to persuade the old water board to transfer the houses, at midnight on 31 March, to the new council that came into being on 1 April. The clerk was the same person in each case, and I am not sure how he did it, but he did and we renovated those houses in the village as council houses, in co-operation particularly with the local WI. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to exempt them from right to buy, and I think that all of them, or perhaps all but one, have now been sold and do not provide the social housing in that village. I am still proud that they have not been pulled down, which was what was going to happen, but it is not quite what we wanted. We were not allowed to take sensible, local decisions on the basis of local circumstances at that time. Unfortunately, that is the case in too many instances.

On 16 May 2013—a long time ago—I instigated a debate on the contribution of outdoor activities to the United Kingdom economy and to the health and well-being of the population. I ended with a quote from John Muir, who, as noble Lords will know, was a founding father of the modern conservation movement. I will repeat it, because it emphasises just how important an active, well-run countryside is to everybody, not just the people who live there:

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul”.

I hope that that kind of thing will be remembered when the Government bring forward their 25-year environment plan—if that is still in existence and still going to happen, and whoever form the Government—and that we will be able to integrate the question of the geography, the landscape, the environment and value for everybody, as well as for the people who live in the countryside itself.

6.01 pm

Lord Cameron of Dillington (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Foster, and his committee for an excellent report. It has a good broad approach, and above all, the case the committee makes for a new overall rural strategy is very convincing. But it is

disappointing that Defra has not picked up on that, and, like other noble Lords, I want to focus on the importance of this integrated agenda. I realise that Defra now has its hands full with the replanning of agriculture, fishing and the environmental infrastructure in this country post Brexit. However, rural prosperity continues to be important to the prosperity of the UK as a whole and needs the attention of government, and that rural prosperity involves not only Defra but all departments. As the report recognises, rural prosperity depends on housing, transport, law and order, health, education and training, so it is a multidepartmental issue as far as government is concerned. In this speech, I want to make the point that Governments do not treat the countryside with any degree of equality or fairness, and thus we do indeed need some general focus, across government, on how to make things work better.

In terms of the disparity, I will start with local authorities. Obviously, the delivery of services costs more per head in rural areas because of the distances and sparsity involved—social services, refuse collection, school transport, et cetera—and yet, in terms of central government support, urban areas get 48% more per head than rural, which means that rural council tax payers pay on average 17% more than their urban cousins—my figures are slightly more conservative than those of the noble Lord, Lord Foster.

In education, too, the lower educational results of our coastal and market towns are almost certainly due to the unfair distribution of educational resources, as the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, has already referred to. On transport, rural residents take one-third as many bus journeys as their urban cousins. This is not surprising, as, due to the 25% cut in local authority funding over the last four years, hundreds of shire bus services have disappeared. A car is now absolutely essential to the rural household. Meanwhile, jobcentre closures all over England mean they get further and further away from the rural population—as do our courts.

It is not only public services. Banks are closing all over the countryside, and there is a shortage of ATMs in rural England. I learned the other day that there is now not a single bank in the whole of Dartmoor National Park, and mostly you can get cash only from post offices. Without cash, of course, your tourist and rural retail economy is severely disadvantaged, which of course makes the rural post office a vital service. But the bureaucracy of post office counters still does not allow local post offices to provide all the services they wish to, including banking services.

On health, the situation here is probably best summed up by two facts and one illogical consequence: the most expensive age cohort to treat medically is from 65 to death; and those aged over 65 represent 16% of the urban population compared to 23% of the rural population. In an attractive county such as Devon that figure is 26%—nearly twice as high as some of our large cities. People like to retire to the countryside. Therefore illogically, funding for public health services, for instance in the county of Devon, is 40% lower per head than the national average and nearly 80% lower than in London, and that ignores the extra costs of actually running a rural health service.

One of the overall problems—this is a general point—is the lack of proper data collection. The health service does not produce rural datasets. The Home Office does not collect rural data on the police service. MHCLG admits to not separating out statistics about housing in rural communities of under 3,000, thus having no real understanding of the effects of its pretty disastrous policies. Since the demise of the CRC there has been very little effective rural research, although last year Defra announced a fresh programme of research, which I hope will prove revealing. I hope so, because the only recent relevant rural research was by the Social Mobility Commission, which found that rural social mobility and intergenerational poverty was now as bad, if not worse, in rural England than in our urban slums. But no one seems to be concerned about this poverty and lack of opportunity.

The reason for my moans about the wider problems of rural living and the rural economy is to show that these issues are multidepartmental. I am not expecting Defra, nor indeed the Government as a whole, to put right the inequalities I have mentioned. There is no extra money. Our national debt is now £1,800 billion—do your Lordships remember the shock and horror when it was £500 billion in 2010?—and, from what we hear today, it is going up by £50 billion per annum. So, as I say, there is no extra money. You cannot alter the formulae for the distribution of existing funds, because that would mean that urban man would lose out—and they have more votes and thus more clout. But this makes the need for a cross-departmental rural strategy even more important. The Government need to find other ways to reach out to their rural constituents.

From my point of view, I still think that rural-proofing, if properly applied, is a key solution. It is the way that services are delivered to rural England that matters, along with the understanding of the rural issues by the civil servants of all departments, such as poverty, transport, housing, training and broadband problems. Rural-proofing is a relatively cheap way of reaching out to rural communities, but unless the civil servants are trained on a regular basis as to what it means and involves, it will never properly happen. Without training, rural-proofing means nothing. As we said in our report on the NERC Act last year, it would be much the best if this agenda was driven from the heart of government, namely the Cabinet Office, although it is to be hoped that the new Defra board will be a step in the right direction. We shall see.

There is huge potential in rural communities, as the noble Lord, Lord Foster, said, and we should always emphasise that. Given the chance, we can help ourselves. There are far more VATable businesses per head in rural England than in urban England, and more manufacturing businesses in rural than in urban England. We are an entrepreneurial lot. Of those in work, there is a higher rate of self-employment: I believe that in urban England the figure is 5%, but in rural England it is on average 9%—in Cornwall, the rate of self-employment is 28%—although unfortunately, they are not always successful. For that reason, we need help. We really do need a long-term strategy for growth. The Government need to pay attention to their rural constituents, and if because of Brexit they cannot take action now, I still believe that, as soon as the post-Brexit

systems have bedded down, they should look again at setting up a multifaceted and cross-departmental panel to produce a rural strategy to ensure equal opportunities for all, no matter where they live. Post-Brexit Britain cannot afford to waste its rural potential.

6.09 pm

The Duke of Montrose (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to be asked to follow my noble kinsman, as I am conscious of the amount of time that he has dedicated to the subject of the rural economy. Today, with the aid of this exemplary report, we are being asked to consider a strategy for the whole rural environment, and the committee has done a good job of assessing all the elements needed for people to function with full access to all that technology has to offer. At the same time, I think we are all conscious of the Countryside Alliance briefing providing us with a full report on the part it played in amassing all this information.

From reading the Government's response, which we have all received, my understanding is that it argues that they have got most of the issues raised covered, but it is hard to see that it produces anything that the rest of us can understand as a strategy. A strategy still needs to come. The element that most interests me, as I have always declared on the record, is agriculture. I am very grateful that my noble friend the Minister is here today to answer our questions, because he is largely responsible in government for that issue. The most encouraging thing going on that I have come across is that, since July, the Government have been conducting an independent review to develop a national food strategy. It is perhaps too early to know what that will come up with, but it is bound to be a key kernel of any rural strategy. Can my noble friend offer any comment on how it is progressing?

If I may, I shall reflect on some of the history of the sector. Noble Lords present may well be acquainted with a marvellously descriptive book about farming at the time of the First World War by a well-known agricultural correspondent called AG Street. The book was called *Farmer's Glory*. The last chapter gives the farmer's perspective on the scene in 1931, reflecting on what he terms,

“the last seven years of depression”.

That takes us back quite a long way, but it has many parallels with what is faced by the agricultural industry today. I quote a few lines he wrote at the time. He said:

“Probably one of the hardest things for farmers to realize to-day is that they are considered unimportant people by the majority of the community ... to-day the consuming public are being fed by foreign countries very cheaply”.

Is that the way we are heading? His other comment of the farmer was that,

“he is engaged in an occupation for which his country has neither use nor interest”.

I hope we have not gone that far. That is only the beginning. Agricultural memories are full of the crash in agricultural activity that followed, which continued up until the Second World War. Strangely, the only way ahead he saw in those days was diversification and grassland farming. My Lords, have we not heard of that formula once again?

[THE DUKE OF MONTROSE]

Now we are coming around to the same story. A no-deal Brexit sounds like it will just repeat that scene. I know, having talked to farmers in Northern Ireland, that they are watching all the different proposals that the Government are producing for their southern border with some trepidation. Half the lamb crop there has to be exported live to the Republic for slaughter and processing. None of us knows whether the EU will wish to reciprocate our tariff-free approach, which, so far as I can understand from the Government's announcement, will be only for one year anyway.

We have heard reassuring noises from the Government about how they undertake to devote the same finance to the rural economy as has been customary for the next two years. That is far from a rural strategy for the industry, where a significant proportion of production is tied into a three-year process. It is easy for Governments to be critical of the money put into farming. We have been offered as a starting point the statistic that 20% of farmers produce 80% of goods. It would then be easy for the economists to say, "We will cut out a large part of all the inefficient farmers". What remains to be seen is whether the present Government's new green approach will recognise that some of what we might call industrial production methods offer the least in terms of the green criteria. Perhaps any strategy for food will have to allow for some element of the less productive farming enterprises to be maintained.

Looking at the issue more widely, I know that the Scottish Government have opted to turn a much bigger area of the country over to forestry. Can my noble friend tell us what is the approach nearer to where we are now? Will that be part of a rural strategy for the rest of the country, and will the Government be looking at a strategy as they go forward?

6.15 pm

Lord Carter of Coles (Lab): My Lords, it was a delight to be a member of the Select Committee on the Rural Economy. We are a diverse group, there were some strong views and we took evidence from a number of organisations which were similar. It was a very good process and it is great credit to our chair, the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, that he managed to corral us—or guide us, whatever the word is—to produce what another noble Lord called this mammoth and, I think, comprehensive report. We were also extremely well served by our clerk, his assistants and our two advisers.

Essentially, the report is about fairness. It is about what should be the division of government expenditure and influence between the various sections of society. Many aspects of rural life are disadvantaged by the unwillingness of successive Governments of all parties to take steps to secure those who live and work in the country—which, despite its charms, is disadvantaged in receipt of key services. I shall cite what I think is the guts of the report. It states:

"No resident or business should be disadvantaged unreasonably by their rural location".

The report is wide-ranging and covers many subjects—housing, healthcare, training et cetera—but I should like to focus on three: transport, digital connectivity and economic development.

Those of us who use the transport system in London are used to a train a minute on the Jubilee line. Sometimes we get frustrated on other lines when we have to wait for seven minutes. Contrast that with other parts of the country, where sometimes you have to wait seven days for a bus, if it comes at all. Bus services, and trains to a degree, in rural areas are characterised by low frequency, limited hours of operation, indirect routes—they tend to wriggle around—and inconsistent connections with other modes. Other countries have done somewhat better. In certain cantons in Switzerland, they have what is called pulse timetabling: it is regular, every hour. In many communities in Switzerland, there is a bus or a train every hour between 6 am and midnight. That means that people can count on it and, not surprisingly, the public transport system is widely used and serves the function of holding things together.

If you look at how these things are financed, there is no greater disparity than the subsidy that we in London and the south-east receive, which is practically £2,000 a head, contrasted with the north of England, where people are getting just £427 towards transport. That is then reflected in fares. If you have to pay, you can get a five-mile trip on a London bus for £1.50. If you go to parts of Hampshire, you will pay £5.65 for the same distance journey. We heard from the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, I think, the sad story of the boy in Cornwall who was offered a tremendous training opportunity—a course. When he asked, "How am I going to get there?", they said, "Take the bus". "But", he said, "it is every two days and I have to attend daily". That is a real failure of policy to deliver. It would be interesting to see, if we took the London subsidy per capita and applied it to rural areas, what a tremendous transport system we could get.

We have heard a lot about digital connectivity. It is very straightforward, but it has been patchy, which is a great disappointment. It is ironic that farmers and the people who serve them are now, in this time of great uncertainty, being told to diversify. Here I declare an interest as a farmer. We have been told to look at other things. Digitally, we need to be enabled, yet it is patchy and inconsistent. For instance, where I live in rural Hertfordshire, recently a group of three houses were quoted £25,000 to be connected to high-speed broadband. The only saving grace is that now they will get £3,400 a head to compensate for it. Looking forward in the digital age, the Government require us to be digital. Healthcare will become digital, and all those things need good connectivity. I hope the Minister can reassure us that the Government will meet the timetable that they have laid down for high-speed connectivity throughout the rural economy.

I turn now to economic development. We had the RDAs; I think their disappearance had a mixed reaction. They have been replaced by LEPs. It is very important that we pay attention to the evidence we heard in the committee. The evidence is that the representation of rural needs around the country, both in membership of LEPs and the economic benefits flowing from them, is inconsistent. There are examples of good practice. The South West Rural Productivity Commission clearly shows how four LEPs joining together can do this. But, in a sense, the key to the rural economy are

SMEs. How do we help them become formed? Above all, how do we help them sustain themselves in the early years in what are very difficult times? Clearly, they need broadband. You cannot now develop a business nationally or internationally from some remote part of Britain unless you have adequate broadband, and it is the responsibility of the Government to make sure that is available.

Over and above that is the issue of physical support. In the evidence we took, we heard that there was a shortage of small workplaces and small offices around the country. One reason is because these are often bad for investors. SMEs are notoriously prone to failure, and therefore there tends to be a market failure of providing for them. In certain parts of the country we have seen local authorities pick up the baton. North Kesteven is a very good example in Lincolnshire, where they have picked up the baton and built small workshops and small offices, and over time these become very successful and self-sustaining. So we need two things: electronic connectivity and physical presence to allow people to come together and do this.

Other noble Lords have mentioned that successive Governments have disregarded the place of the rural economy in our country. It is rather strange, given that it involves 17% of the population—getting on for one in five people—yet I feel that they feel unrepresented. I hope that the Minister, when he responds, can tell us that there will be a more determined, active and pace-driven approach to this, because it is a very important sector, which will come under pressure. Whatever happens with Brexit now, undoubtedly there will be great change in the countryside, and it is critical that we have a clear rural policy.

I was reflecting that the approach of successive Governments has been like the legendary dog watching television; you know what they say: “He can see it, but he doesn’t get it”. There is something like that in all these successive government policies, and I hope that the report, complete with its recommendations on rural-proofing, gives this Government some means of actually getting it.

6.23 pm

Earl of Devon (CB): My Lords, I give my thanks and appreciation to the noble Lord, Lord Foster, and to the Rural Economy Select Committee for its mammoth report. The committee’s work raises so many important issues. It has been a busy weekend to consume, let alone digest, its 235 pages. I declare at the outset my interests as set down in the register. I manage an old, family-run SME that is impacted by almost every recommendation of this report. I live in a rural community and make daily use of rural services, including transport, schools and connectivity. I champion in this House the interests of Devon, notably a rural county that has been much mentioned and is keen to engage in this rural strategy debate. I pay tribute to the work of the local LEAs in Devon and, in particular, the South West Rural Productivity Commission.

While applauding the focus on the rural economy and rural interests, I think it is worth debating the benefits of a separate and distinct rural strategy. One of the real challenges faced by folks living in the countryside is a sense of separation from the urban

majority. I am not yet clear on whether a focus on a specific rural strategy, as distinct from an urban strategy, does not risk encouraging a sense of separateness and of alienation from the mainstream. Indeed, it may have the countereffect of causing rural communities to be further marginalised. One lesson of the committee’s focus on rural life is the remarkable diversity of businesses, communities, environments and people that can be categorised as rural. All of these have different needs that may not be satisfied by a single strategy.

Historically, rural and urban communities were wholly and consciously interdependent. This is seen well in Devon, where medieval agriculture and rural production were fed down rivers and canals to be processed and milled in market towns, such as Tiverton and Honiton, before being traded and exported via urban centres, such as Exeter and Bristol. The interconnectedness and interdependence of rural and urban society were clear. While we do not see the relationship between urban and rural communities in nearly the same way today, that interconnectedness is very much still present, and it is only going to increase between now and 2050.

It is the rural economy that our urban population depends on for its water, food and fresh air and, increasingly, for the management of the nation’s reserves of natural capital. Indeed, at page 8 in the report, where the committee discusses the elements of a rural strategy, rather than considering,

“the contribution of rural economies to the wellbeing of rural communities”,

should it not equally focus on the contribution of rural economies to the well-being of urban communities? Does the Minister agree?

As the nation sets its world-leading climate mitigation targets and strategies, as well as ambitious, nationwide health and well-being policies, it is to the rural landscape and the rural economy that the nation will look to deliver these policies. It is only the countryside that can offset our carbon emissions; it is only the countryside that can provide locally sourced, ecologically sound and nutritious food; and it is only our rural communities that provide opportunity for well-managed amenity space for leisure and well-being.

Ideally, this interaction and interconnectedness between urban and rural communities should be driven by market forces, encouraged by national policy but informed and designed at the local level, with devolved decision-making powers allowing rural communities to determine their own rural needs, as well as how best to satisfy those urban demands.

Rural-proofing is a concept that I think remains ill defined. I know that my noble friend Lord Cameron has done much excellent work in this area, and I support the need to assess the impact of government policy on rural areas. I agree that rural-proofing needs to be better defined and better implemented if it is to be effective.

With respect to place-based approaches, I agree it is essential that rural policy, particularly at a local level, is driven by rural, not urban, decision-makers. If a sustainable solution is to work, it must surely be those who live and work in rural communities and who manage rural businesses who decide on how rural

[EARL OF DEVON]

policies are to be developed. I am concerned to see the Government's response stating explicitly that rural decision-making must be handled by local authorities because,

"local authorities are accountable to their own electorates and should decide their own priorities".

This suggests that, if a local authority's electorate is predominantly urban, that local authority is entitled to ignore the needs and demands of its rural constituencies—the tyranny of the democratic majority.

The digital revolution provides great opportunity for rural communities, particularly with respect to artificial intelligence, remote working and virtual businesses. But the greater the disparity in connectivity, the more economic disparities will increase. Devon has seen considerable challenges with its rural digital rollout in recent years, despite considerable focus from local government. Ofcom's registration and authorisation processes need urgently to be reviewed and better articulated, as they are acting as a considerable brake on fibre connectivity.

I have been involved in our local village neighbourhood plan over the past three years and can speak with some authority on the way in which the neighbourhood planning process works. First, I can vouch for the fact that it is very hard work and demands a considerable amount of effort from the unpaid volunteers involved. This will be the reason why its uptake is restricted largely to affluent and older communities—because only they can afford the considerable time to commit to the process and adopt it.

Secondly, I note that, by natural selection, those who sit on such community-focused committees and engage with their processes tend to be older and retired, which means that the neighbourhood plans reflect the views of only part of the population—typically not those with school-age children or a need for affordable housing. I agree with the conclusions and recommendations on affordable housing. One of the notable characteristics of our local housing stock is how many older empty-nesters remain in large family houses, for want of alternative smaller homes in the local community. Affordable housing is essential both for those starting the journey up the property ladder and those moving gently down. I do not pretend to understand the complex relationship between land prices and government policy, but would expect that, with a simpler planning system and the increased supply that would result, the cost of small, mixed housing developments would decrease considerably.

The provision of services to rural populations needs renewed focus, and I support the committee's efforts in this regard. The relative underfunding of schools, doctors, transport, social care, police and other essential services in our rural communities is a stain on our public life. It is often only the strength of rural communities, and the generosity of local volunteers, churches and neighbours, that keep these communities functioning, by stepping in where public services fail.

Finally, we are all well aware of the greatest challenge facing the rural economy now: the threat of a no-deal Brexit and the disastrous consequences that would follow. As I mentioned earlier, the LEP in Devon has

said that it would be worse than foot and mouth. I wonder whether the Minister agrees with that statement, as the noble Lord, Lord Callanan, did earlier. The rural economy is living through a period of terrifying uncertainty, with no clarity whatever on the future of agriculture, fisheries or the environment. Prorogation is only hours away and a Queen's Speech is due next week. I make a simple request of the Government: please get Brexit resolved and give rural communities the legislative framework they deserve to plan for and deliver a sustainable future.

6.32 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, I am delighted to participate in this debate and add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, and the whole committee on the excellent work and the conclusions they reached in their report. I have come to a slightly different conclusion, which is entirely complementary to the recommendations and conclusions that the committee reached. The conclusion I have reached is that most of the policies we have discussed in this debate were devised by many who enjoyed an urban upbringing, went to an urban-based university and then went into one of the main departments of state. One tweak to the report that does not encompass just the work of Defra could be that any new civil servant and government official who commences working for the Government should spend three months embedded in a rural environment, going round and experiencing at first hand how the policies they are going to implement will impact on the rural economy.

Why did I reach that conclusion? I grew up in the Pennines. I worked for a number of years as an MEP. In fact, I was my noble friend Lord Haselhurst's MEP; he was my MP. More recently, I spent years in North Yorkshire as a local MP. I was also educated in Harrogate. I was sorry to hear how few shops there are in Harrogate and ashamed to remember how much I enjoyed visiting them as a schoolgirl, which I was not meant to do during school hours.

I will declare other interests. I was privileged to serve as chairman of the Defra committee in the other place. I am currently patron of the Institute of Agricultural Secretaries and Administrators. I sit on the Rural Affairs Group of the Church of England. I am an honorary associate fellow of the British Veterinary Association and an honorary president of the Huby and Sutton agricultural show. Part of the work that I undertake outside is working for the Dispensing Doctors' Association. My father and brother were both dispensing doctors in their time. This is one area that goes to the heart of how those in the Department of Health and Social Care fail to understand the role of dispensing doctors and pharmacies in rural areas, as opposed to those who work in urban areas. We just need to look—as has been rehearsed this afternoon—at how delivering healthcare in rural areas is more expensive: running ambulances is more expensive, and obviously it is more challenging for patients to reach their GP and hospital appointments. If they do not have a car, they have to rely on neighbours or very erratic bus services.

However, what the Government often seek to do is almost cut the money in primary healthcare in favour of secondary healthcare, which is normally delivered

in an urban area. How many times do people now go to hospital as an emergency rather than having a GP appointment because it takes three weeks to get a GP appointment, both in rural and urban areas?

So I hope that the Government might reverse their priorities and look to give more funds to delivering healthcare in rural areas through dispensing doctors, because they are the first line of patient care. If we fail the dispensing GPs and reduce their resources, it will make life more difficult for hospitals. The number of closures of community hospitals has, again, had an impact on acute hospitals, because there is nowhere else for people to go to recover after an operation or stroke—which is one of the roles of community healthcare.

To me, the heart of a rural economy is the farm and rural businesses, among which farms are obviously pre-eminent. Then there is the mart, where animals and livestock are taken. North Yorkshire is one of the excellent livestock production parts of the country. If farmers are doing well, market towns will do well. I see marts as having both an economic and a social function. When we had the foot and mouth crisis, to which the noble Earl, Lord Devon, referred, farmers could no longer go to the mart—and that was where churches in rural parts of North Yorkshire came into their own, because they were able to assemble farmers and their families on a Sunday for a form of worship.

The farmers are coming under unprecedented pressure, because we know that European Union funds will go. We do not know whether they will go at the next election, which is imminent, or will be phased out from 2020 over a seven-year period. I do know that the North Yorkshire Moors National Park has benefited to the tune of £2.3 million under the LEADER programme, which has had to be wound up early because we are leaving the European Union. It helped create 54 jobs and 69 businesses, attracted 65,000 more visitors to the park and aided more than 6,000 rural residents in the park. Some £138 million across the whole of England has benefited rural areas through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The point has to be made: if we are taking access to direct payments and countryside stewardship schemes away from farmers and are going to have environmental schemes, ELMs, which have not been trialled and tested—we do not know what they will look like and the farmers do not know what criteria they will have to meet—we have to be aware that the only people who will benefit from many of the environmental benefits such as planting trees and creating bogs and dams will be the owners of the land.

In this country we have a long tradition, not understood in the rest of Europe, of tenant farmers. Particularly in North Yorkshire, County Durham, Northumbria and other parts, tenant farmers are graziers on common land. I urge the department, through my noble friend the Minister, to have particular regard to the future of these graziers on common land—tenant farmers and those who do not own the land but nevertheless look after it. I also hope we will look to increase food production to make sure we remain mindful of food security and, if anything, become more self-sufficient.

I have reached the conclusion I have because all rural services are intertwined: access to rural transport, affordable homes, rural schools, the health service,

good communications—both broadband and mobile phone coverage, which is woeful and dangerous in parts of North Yorkshire—and, as others have mentioned, access to a post office, bank, community shop and the local church. It is obvious that many across government departments do not understand rural areas. I make this plea: perhaps a three-month period at the start of a new person taking up a role will enable them to understand rural life and the rural economy better.

6.40 pm

Lord Dannatt (CB): My Lords, I begin my remarks this evening by thanking the usual channels for finding time, in these rather uncertain times, for us to have a debate on this report by the Rural Economy Select Committee, albeit at the second or third time of asking. From a personal point of view, it has been a privilege to serve on this committee. The subject matter is somewhat apart from my normal spheres of interest, but, as the declarations of interest show, I live in rural Norfolk, run the family arable farm and am a past president of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association. Moreover, it has been a pleasure to serve under the expert committee chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath. I have much valued the experience of being a member of this Select Committee, enjoyed the interaction with its other members, appreciated the advice of our clerks and advisers and been impressed by our witnesses.

After much discussion, our report was given the title, *Time for a Strategy for the Rural Economy*. We believe that the rural economy not only needs a strategy but needs it now. In our view, it is indeed time for a strategy for the rural economy. That is our conviction, even if we have so far failed to sell that to the Government. At the risk of repeating what has already been said this evening, I underline the imperative of our core objective: to make the case for a thriving rural economy, which, in our view, can best be achieved by an effective strategy underpinned by better rural-proofing and delivered through a place-based approach—an approach that fully reflects the diversity of our countryside and the capabilities and knowledge of those who live and work there. The report expands on how this can come about, and we are grateful to the Government for giving consideration to many of our recommendations.

However, I would like to underline one of our key recommendations that, in my view, has been rather lightly acknowledged and addressed by the Government. In paragraph 58 of our report, on the need for a comprehensive rural strategy, we said:

“Development ... must involve all ... Government departments and bodies who must then be responsible and accountable for its implementation. To enable scrutiny of performance, there should be an annual report to Parliament, coordinated by Defra and drawn from all Government departments, which would set out the Government's performance against the strategy and include an update on how departments have fulfilled their rural proofing obligations”.

To the committee, this seemed potentially a most effective way to hold the Government to account to ensure that the intent of any given strategy was implemented in the way envisaged. It is therefore somewhat disappointing to note in paragraph 8 of the Government's response that our recommendation for an annual report, while accepted implicitly, is not

[LORD DANNATT]

given the prominence that such a key scrutiny mechanism deserves. Instead, we are offered the rather limited statement:

“The impact of new policies on rural areas should be systematically and consistently monitored as they are implemented. This would include an update on the performance of rural proofing across government in the Government’s annual report on the implementation of the rural strategy”.

While I accept that these words acknowledge the need for an annual report, I remain concerned that the Government have not taken on board fully that this is a key recommendation. Moreover, it is a high-profile way to make sure that not just Defra but all government departments, whose services play a vital role in rural areas, have a shared responsibility—albeit co-ordinated by Defra—to report to Parliament annually on the delivery and implementation of the overall strategy. I would be grateful for confirmation from the Minister that this recommendation is fully understood and will be acted on.

Many other points could be addressed this evening, but I will highlight two other issues covered in the report: the challenges of building rural communities and the challenges surrounding loneliness in rural communities.

The report acknowledges that many of the elements that have traditionally bound communities together have been eroded. Many local shops and pubs have closed, as have post offices and bank branches. Local leaders, such as a priest in every parish, are a rarity. Finding volunteers to join parish councils is a challenge in many areas. While the report urges local authorities to do what they can to promote the development of communities, there is also a realisation that much of the initiative lies with local charities and individuals. In this regard, the *Village Survival Guide* published by the Prince’s Countryside Fund, which gives sound advice on how to build a strong community, is to be warmly welcomed.

Moreover, an effective community is an important element in reducing the sense of loneliness that many people experience in rural areas. Poor local transport services exacerbate a sense of isolation, especially among older people. Furthermore, modern farming methods often mean that individuals spend much time on their own. These circumstances combine to create mental health issues, which place great pressure on the delivery of healthcare services in rural areas.

The report welcomes the Government’s loneliness strategy, and it is pleasing to note in the Government’s response to the report that last year the Minister for Loneliness co-hosted a round-table discussion on rural loneliness with the Minister for Rural Affairs. But there is only so much the Government can do, and much of the initiative lies more effectively with the charitable sector. In Norwich Cathedral last Sunday, along with the harvest produce processed to the altar at the harvest festival service was a pair of work boots no longer needed by a farm worker who had just taken his own life. This sad sight was a sobering way of highlighting the loneliness issue by a charity called YANA: You Are Not Alone. Again, this illustrates

that many of the solutions to pressing problems can best be found when the public, private and charitable sectors work effectively together.

In conclusion, I urge the Government to regard this comprehensive Select Committee report as an important baseline document on which to plan and build a proper strategy for the rural economy. I look forward to seeing the first annual report to Parliament at some point next year.

6.47 pm

Baroness Rock (Con): My Lords, it has been a privilege to serve on the Select Committee on the Rural Economy and to contribute to the report we are debating. I add my thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, for his enthusiastic and engaging chairmanship and to my fellow committee members for thoughtful discussions. I also thank our clerk, Simon Keal, and the special advisers for their invaluable support.

The Government’s embrace of a sophisticated approach to an industrial strategy was welcome recognition that a modern economy, competing in a globalised world, requires partnership between the public and private sectors. Nowhere is this more the case than in the rural economy. This is why I fully support the committee’s conclusion that a comprehensive rural strategy is the antidote to today’s world of rural poverty, decline in agriculture and poor connectivity, both physical and digital.

To be clear, this is not about success subsidising failure. Indeed, when it comes to the give and take of tax and spend—and as we have heard from the noble Lords, Lord Foster of Bath and Lord Cameron of Dillington—urban areas in 2017-18 received about 45% more per head for local government services than their rural counterparts, despite rural residents paying 17% more per head in council tax. This is actually about realising the potential of all our assets and skills. A strong economy, increased productivity and thriving communities cannot be achieved without realising the vital role of our countryside. As we have heard, the Government reject the idea of a distinct rural strategy while agreeing with the need for more place-based initiatives and the rural-proofing of all policy. Let us hope that this is a semantic difference and instead focus on some key areas of policy that require a sharp focus on rural affairs.

First, with Brexit stalking their every move, we should start with the plight of our farmers. I refer the House to my interest set out in the register as a director of a farming enterprise. I am certainly no defender of the common agricultural policy. It represents poor value for money and creates perverse incentives up and down the farming value chain. However, it is the system into which our farmers are currently locked so, like the rest of the business community, they are still wondering what will come next. The Agriculture Bill has no date for Report or Third Reading, despite the Public Bill Committee having completed its scrutiny. I share the Defra Secretary of State’s view, given most recently at the Conservative Party conference, that we must release our farmers from the rigidity and bureaucracy of the common agricultural policy, but we need as much clarity and certainty on this as possible, not least about the fate of the Bill in this or any future Parliament.

I shall make one small comment on policy. It was eloquently made by my noble friend Lady McIntosh of Pickering. Tenanted agricultural land makes up more than one-third of all farmland in the country. Presently, many tenant farmers are restricted in the use of their holdings to agricultural purposes only. This means that they may well be disfranchised if landlords do not give consent for tenants to access new financial support schemes to provide the public goods the Government intend. It is important that landlords do not take advantage of tenants under these circumstances, and indeed that tenants are given the right to seek consent that the landlord cannot unreasonably delay or deny. I know that representations have been made to include agricultural tenancy reform provisions in the Agriculture Bill. Will the Minister give assurances that when the Bill moves from the back burner to the front burner such provisions will be included? It is vital that tenant farmers are provided with the necessary and reasonable tools to be sustainable and resilient in the long term.

As we all know, the rural economy is not just farming, but a diverse, dynamic and innovative community of small businesses. These businesses need the support that rural-proofing might bring. I shall highlight two specific areas. The first is, as the noble Lord, Lord Carter of Coles, stated, a key responsibility of any Government: digital infrastructure. Some 70% of respondents to a Countryside Alliance survey cited digital infrastructure as the most important issue facing the rural economy. Our committee found that in the rollout of full fibre and 5G technology, policy and funding announcements were encouraging. The Government agreed that mobile operators bidding in the 700 megahertz spectrum auction would ensure that rural areas were prioritised. However, we now see that Ofcom has committed to only 90% coverage over four years. We must hope that the sharing of spectrum bands and the discussions between the Government and operators to create a shared rural network bear fruit. If they deliver the coverage our rural economy needs without resorting to coverage obligations, so much the better, although I note that the Countryside Alliance believes that coverage obligations remain essential.

Finally, as a complement to infrastructure, rural SMEs also need access to world-class skills and talent if they are to grow and succeed in the global economy. There is much in existing policy frameworks to give encouragement, but we must ensure there is throughput. The business productivity review should benefit rural communities, given the significant numbers of rural SMEs, but only if the Government follow through on rural-proofing it. We talk a lot in this place and elsewhere about innovation and productivity as the means to continue to succeed as a global economic power. Let us not forget the role of the rural economy in helping us do this because in it there are innovation, creativity, jobs and opportunity. All we have to do is empower.

6.55 pm

Lord Colgrain (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, on his deft chairing of the committee, and I thank the other members of the committee for making it such an enjoyable and

informative exercise. My entry in the register of interests shows that I have a lot of commitments to the rural sector, and it was a real privilege to serve on the committee. I also thank the staff, two of whom are present. The clerk was Simon Keal, and such was the sure touch with which he conducted our affairs that we would never have known that it was his first time in such a role. Katie Barraclough, the policy analyst, and Breda Twomey, the committee assistant, instilled great confidence, and the committee was grateful for their application and professionalism.

The remit of the committee,

“to consider the rural economy and to make recommendations”.

could not have been broader and each chapter in the published report could have constituted the basis of a stand-alone report. However, there are two recommendations by the committee to which I would like to add further comment in the light of the Government’s response. The first relates to digital connectivity. The House has already heard much about this from committee members. On 3 August, the new BT chief executive gave no comfort at all when he was reported in the *Times* as saying that the company was ready to step up the construction of the next generation network and that:

“It could be a very positive story, a national mission”.

He has since tabled six points to the Government on behalf of the industry that must be addressed to meet the 2025 target. In addition, the Chancellor announced last week a further £5 billion to improve digital connectivity, but without, it must be said, the authority that would seem necessary to insist on the work being done with the timeliness that is required.

Let me give him a first-hand account of the obstacles that he, and we as a country, face. I am one of 45 households in our area of West Kent discussing a community fibre partnership with Openreach. We are located 30 miles from Hyde Park Corner, so it is not exactly the back of beyond. We are a mix of individual residential houses and businesses, and we are in the process of sending a sheet of completed information back to Openreach to apply for the requisite vouchers. We are told that this process will take four to six weeks in addition to the nine months that it has already taken us to get this far in the process, and we are assured that the work will be carried out within 12 months, but that is after the additional three months that it will take DCMS to approve the rural gigabyte voucher scheme. That means that if all perform up to their promise, it will have taken us two years to upgrade from our current 2.15 megabits per second to a promised superfast broadband speed. For rural businesses and communities, this timescale is calamitous. We have been told that 550 such CFP partnerships have been delivered by Openreach to date, with 90,000 households connected out of the 5% of the country still without broadband. Given that there are 1.5 million households still to be connected, it is evident that the recommendation in our report that Ofcom urgently review the universal service obligation is something on which this Government, and every future Government, must concentrate with an all-out effort to achieve. Our Prime Minister, in Billy Bunterish mode in his conference speech last week, referred to gigabit broadband spreading rapidly

[LORD COLGRAIN]

across the country like tendrils of superinformative vermicelli. Well, if he wants culinary imagery, he is talking tripe.

The second set of recommendations that I seek to highlight relate to recommendations 90 and 91 in our report on the subject of apprenticeships, and the Government's reply, which in large part supports our suggestions. I know that the whole House agrees that in the person of the Minister, my noble friend Lord Gardiner, we are fortunate to have someone who is so totally in tune with and so personally well informed about the issues sweeping across the rural economy. However, I ask him to give special consideration to the apprenticeship issue. With the uncertainties relating to the availability of skilled full-time and part-time employees across the rural sector as a whole, and in particular horticulture, silviculture and now increasingly viticulture in Kent, these positive responses by the Government to the whole question of apprenticeships and the training of young people are to be welcomed. I urge the Minister to do his utmost to accelerate assistance in this area and to further the positive momentum that the Government have already generated. I would like to hear from him how this can be achieved.

7 pm

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD):

My Lords, I add my thanks and congratulations to my colleague and noble friend Lord Foster of Bath on his excellent report into the state of the rural economy and on his all-embracing introduction. I declare my interest as the chair of the National Community Land Trust Network and as a vice-president of the LGA.

The noble Lord, Lord Cameron, eloquently illustrated the problems of rural areas. The state of the rural economy has been debated many times over recent years but nothing seems to happen. Back in March this year, I had the privilege of being a speaker at a conference in Taunton whose sole purpose was to call for a government strategy for the rural economy. We have strategies for industry and business and strategies for transport but there is nothing for the rural areas.

Those of us living in rural communities feel that we are the Cinderella service areas of the country. Sadly, unlike Cinderella, no handsome prince is going to come over the hill on his white horse to rescue us from our fate. It is up to us to make a noise about the huge disparity in the services that rural areas receive and those enjoyed by residents in more urban and city areas. I think that we have done a pretty good job of that today.

I was not surprised that the lack of digital connectivity came out top of the significant issues covered in the report. Broadband is essential, as nearly every speaker has demonstrated. I welcomed the comments about local enterprise partnerships. Their constitution and make-up mean that they are concentrated in centres of population. LEPs that operate in areas where two-tier local authorities exist only ever hear the view of a single district council, as only one seat is allocated between their districts. This can lead to investments being skewed. I share the concerns of the noble Earl, Lord Caithness—LEPs should embrace rural-proofing without delay.

I am also concerned about the lack of public transport and long journeys to school for children in deep rural areas. Noble Lords who have spoken in this very interesting debate have covered a great many of the aspects that those of us in rural areas encounter on a daily basis. The noble Lord, Lord Carter of Coles, spoke about bus services. My noble friend Lady Humphreys raised the issue of funding in rural schools and access to cash. With the closure of hundreds of small rural banks, it was essential that post offices were able to step forward. The noble Lord, Lord Cameron, emphasised the need for rural-proofing, which is multidepartmental, covering health, education, transport, rural crime and business development. I am sure that most noble Lords agree with that.

As I was, sadly, not a member of the committee under the excellent chairmanship of my noble friend, I cannot comment in depth on this report. Instead, I shall concentrate on the lack of affordable housing. If young people, couples or families are unable to access decent housing that they can afford, their ability to thrive and enjoy access to employment and health provision will be severely diminished.

Many of us who walk around London on a regular basis are well used to seeing people sleeping and living on the streets. I assure the House that that is not confined to cities. It is a scene that can also be witnessed in market towns, where those who are unable to afford a home to rent are driven to desperate measures. A report published on 4 October indicated that 94% of homes for rent in the country are unaffordable for people in receipt of benefits and on low incomes. There will be numerous reasons why people "fall off the kerb" of housing and find themselves homeless. The tenant or home owner will not be at fault. They find themselves unable to pay their mortgage or rent and end up sleeping in shop doorways. If they are lucky, they might be offered bed and breakfast accommodation or find a bed in a hostel on a nightly basis but with no security for the future. Homelessness is a scourge on our society and needs to be tackled without delay.

Up and down the country, many rural communities have realised that they need a better mix of accommodation to meet the needs of their residents. Housing schemes that come from the efforts of the communities themselves are more likely to succeed. Currently over 280 community land trust schemes are running in the country. I am not pretending that this is a quick fix—far from it—but there are some significant successes, and CLTs are definitely place based.

During September, I was lucky enough to be at the opening of a CLT housing development of eight homes in Dorset. It consisted of very high-quality homes of mixed size. The occupants ranged from an elderly couple who had downsized to a bungalow to a single mother and her daughter, other families with children and a young adult with learning difficulties. This young man's family were in the three-bedroom home and he was going into the one-bedroom home. He would have independence but his mother would be on site to keep an eye on him.

Understandably, villages do not want their size to be doubled by a single housing development but they are open to small, carefully planned housing that will

meet the needs of their parish and carry them forward on a sustainable basis. The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick of Undercliffe, gave another excellent example of that.

Many speakers mentioned the lack of public transport. In my village the regular bus service has long since finished. It has been replaced by a dial-up service to divert a bus from the route along the A30. This means that planning ahead is essential, and there will be no second chance if you miss that bus. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London gave a wonderful list of the services that churches are providing to rural and other communities. I agree with the noble Earl, Lord Devon, about the difficulties of neighbourhood plans, having been involved in one. The noble Baronesses, Lady McIntosh of Pickering and Lady Rock, the noble Earl, Lord Devon, and the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, highlighted the problems facing farmers. We should not underestimate these problems.

We have had a very informative debate about the serious issues and difficulties that plague our rural communities. A government strategy for the rural economy in Britain is long overdue, and I look forward to the Minister's response to the many questions that have been put to him.

7.07 pm

Lord Grantchester (Lab): My Lords, this is an excellent report and a credit to your Lordships' House. I welcome this debate and am grateful for all the contributions on the wide-ranging issues generated by the report. I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Foster, for chairing the Select Committee and for his excellent introduction to the debate. He gave a very good synopsis and I agree with his conclusions. I also thank all members of the committee for their contributions, drawing attention to the rural economy. I declare my interest as a farmer in receipt of EU funds and, in previous times, as a director of the Cheshire & Warrington Economic Alliance—a sub-regional body under the North-West Development Agency—and other organisations.

Rural England faces significant and wide-ranging challenges, as demonstrated by the sheer size and breadth of the committee's report. The committee is to be congratulated further in that the report brings with it reflections of the long tailback of different approaches and attempts by different Governments over many years to deal comprehensively once again with the challenges of the rural economy. I concur with the report's conclusion that current government policy does not take enough account of the contribution that rural economies can make to the nation's prosperity and well-being, or the specific needs of rural economies and the challenges facing them.

For too long, these issues have been sidelined and not considered in the context of wider policy-making, which has resulted in the application of policies devised largely for urban and suburban economies, which are often inappropriate for rural Britain. The report is timely and urgently needs to be responded to more adequately by the Government and by Defra in particular, as the UK has to regenerate from the misguided policies of austerity as it stands on the cusp of a decision on its future place in the world. There needs to be a concerted focus on putting the rural economy at the heart of policy-making. We have heard several proposals recently

concerning whether this policy area should be separated from the current Defra brief. The Government and Defra need to consider carefully the language and names they give to policy initiatives if they are to embrace the right culture. This tends to have the bureaucratic straitjacket of the machinery of government and how that interacts with businesses and communities at all levels, whether central, regional or local. To talk universally about an industrial strategy is immediately to paint all areas with one brush. The word "industry" is not one that resonates with rurality or diversity. While there may be different interpretations of demarcations and structures, there is a need for a different tone and use of language to reflect the rural perspective with titles such as "rural enterprise strategies" or even "local enterprise strategies" rather than using the word "industrial".

Some 72% of people in rural areas are employed in SME companies, compared with 42% in urban areas. There can be little embedding of new approaches and outcomes are unlikely to change if there is a lack of recognition in the Government's approach, as characterised by their general complacency in their response, emphasising local authorities when they are highly constrained by central government financial statutory straitjackets and where public-private partnerships struggle with bureaucratic interpretations of what their areas need most. The report concludes correctly that there is a huge disparity and inconsistency between delivery in different areas. Devolution, regional authorities, city-based structures, development agencies and LEPs all face challenges in engagement, effectiveness and relevance. The restructuring tends to lead to tarnishing changes with a political hue. The report underlines the target of successful evidence-based outcomes in individual areas that work best for them.

Perhaps Defra as a whole should be the champion of the rural economy given that the nomenclature of "rural affairs" carries with it the downplay of the rural economy into an odd mixture of miscellaneous activities on the periphery. Being the champion of the rural economy does not mean that the department must be diminished by hiving off parts to the DCLG, the Cabinet Office or DCMS. A key undercurrent of the report is the emphasis it places on rural-proofing as a vital ingredient to embed the interests of the rural economy into government. This is fundamental and cannot be emphasised enough. I welcome the recommendations made in the report in this respect. It draws attention to the inclusion of a rural impact assessment in all legislation and providing an annual report to Parliament to include non-departmental public bodies, local authorities and all spending bodies.

Our rural towns and villages are home to 9 million people and the vital role of genuinely affordable housing in thriving rural communities must not be underestimated. An understanding of this, together with the report's recommendation for adequate rural-proofing of our housing and planning policies is critical to the very survival of rural communities. They are feeling the pressure of the broken housing market as much as towns and cities are. A quality affordable home feels out of reach to so many, given that most such homes cost 8.8 times the average lower wages in rural areas as compared with 7.5 times in predominantly urban areas

[LORD GRANTCHESTER]
 excluding London. I thank my noble friend Lady Warwick for her remarks on housing and its central role in rural communities.

The rural housing crisis has been exacerbated by government policies. Indeed, the report highlights that since 2012, of every eight homes sold under right-to-buy schemes, only one is replaced in the rural community. Unless action is taken now to replace the affordable homes that have been lost to right to buy and rocketing house prices, there is a real danger that living in the countryside will become the preserve of the wealthy and that the diversity of rural communities will be undermined. Access to affordable homes can enable generations to stay in close proximity, keeping families together and tackling the other scourges of rural living—loneliness and social isolation—as highlighted in the report. Affordable homes provide critical support for the rural economy, including the labour force needed for the farming and food businesses that contribute so much to the rural economy. The National Housing Federation and housing associations believe that genuinely affordable homes are the key to equipping rural communities to thrive.

Successful rural economies depend on a wide range of services and support to help individual businesses grow and attract people to work and prosper in our countryside. However, as local people struggle to remain in their communities due to the housing crisis, we are seeing the loss of vital services. Education and colleges were mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys. Schools in rural areas have made up 40% of school closures over the past decade, up from 20% in the decade before, while we are losing rural post offices at an average of three per month. Travelling to appointments further afield is made even harder due to the cuts in bus services in rural areas. This, together with cuts to rural post offices, banks and enterprise through the Plunkett Foundation mentioned by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London, the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, my noble friend Lord Carter and the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, has made life for people in rural Britain extremely difficult, hitting the hardest those most in need of public services.

Any consideration of the rural economy and its needs is answered by the number one priority, that of digital connectivity. It is the cornerstone that shapes the transformation of all areas of rural life and success is dependent on it. All the contributions to this debate have mentioned it. The nature of the rural economy means that it is much more diverse, with challenges around costs and scarcity. This needs to be recognised in the targets for the delivery of broadband and mobile phone signals. Some 95% of premises in the UK have access to broadband, but this covers only 75% of rural businesses.

Figure 3 in the report gives the percentages of registered business units in rural England and portrays that the largest of them are, first, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and, secondly, professional and technical services at 15% each, with the accompanying food and tourism sectors at 5%. It also reveals that more than 35% of enterprises are SMEs. Development can only proceed in step with the digital economy. The revolution of computerisation and data management in agriculture

is needed both at the cow side, as I can vouch for in dairying, and in the tractor cab, where precision farming is necessary for minimum tilling and the avoidance of soil compaction. It is not clear from figure 3 where transport and integrated supply chains for goods come in this appraisal, but necessarily professional and technical services provide vital support across all enterprises. Tourism, mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, is crying out for a rural sector deal and is characterised by establishments all needing connectivity for their customers.

However, in the digital world, the government targets are too slow. Currently, 4G coverage is at only 67% of geographical UK coverage even though this may be at 98% in urban areas. For rural areas to benefit from the expansion of 4G, 2026 is too slow: 95% coverage is needed by 2024. Focusing on 5G fails to recognise that the basic infrastructure of 4G has to be in place for areas to be able to benefit from 5G. Treasury spectrum auctions need to recognise the payoff between price and a more ambitious, quicker coverage, with more capacity throughout rural areas. No modern business—certainly not a rural-based one—can exist without 100% coverage of fibre to the home.

In conclusion, I thank noble Lords for their contributions to this thorough and well-considered report, as well as all those who have participated in this excellent debate. While many of the challenges identified and discussed are not new, it would be remiss of me not to highlight the challenge Brexit presents to the rural economy. Indeed, the report acknowledges that rural economies and the farming sector in particular are significantly affected by the CAP, including its rural development pillar. Some rural areas have also received considerable support from other EU structural funds. The UK will lose access to such funding after its departure. Although the Government have committed to replacing these funds with a domestic shared prosperity fund, it is not yet clear how such a fund will be administered or how it will be delivered in rural areas, or even if the same total funding will be available.

With just three weeks until the Prime Minister insists that we will leave the EU—“do or die”—businesses remain very concerned about the prospect of a no-deal Brexit, which will have a catastrophic impact on the rural economy. I make no apology to the Minister for drawing attention once again—building on the remarks made by the noble Earl, Lord Devon—to the fact that farmers are particularly vulnerable to a no-deal Brexit. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to address these concerns and additional challenges in his response. I note that nearly every speaker today has expressed disappointment in the Government’s reply.

7.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, I declare my farming interests as stated in the register. I thank the committee for its report and for the opportunity to give evidence earlier this year. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, and all members of the committee on such a wide-ranging and thorough inquiry. All of us who

care for the future of our rural communities must welcome the report as a thoughtful and constructive contribution.

At the heart of our debate this afternoon is the question of how best to nurture rural communities. It is a goal we all share. We all want to see flourishing rural communities where people thrive, businesses prosper and the rural way of life continues in all its richness and diversity.

As the committee's report acknowledged, strong foundations are already in place. Indeed, the noble Lords, Lord Cameron of Dillington and Lord Grantchester, referred to the great contribution rural areas make—nearly £250 billion to England's economy. Half a million businesses are registered in rural areas, which is one-quarter of the total. Employment rates in rural areas are higher than the UK average. Many people choose to live in rural areas because of the quality of life. Net migration to rural areas has increased since 2008. Life expectancy and well-being are deemed higher. As the committee expressed, there is much to be said for rural life.

However, we must not forget that the very characteristics that make life in rural areas so attractive also present challenges for those who live and work there, as many of your Lordships have described. Rural areas are more geographically dispersed and more sparsely populated. While these features are among the key attractions, they bring challenges all too familiar to those who live there. Digital connectivity and public transport are poorer. Affordable housing is in short supply. People have to travel further to access essential services such as schools, colleges and hospitals. Distance makes many public services more costly to deliver. There is a higher proportion of older people, which places pressure on health and social services. As we know, there are pockets of extreme deprivation.

My noble friend Lord Caithness mentioned Julian Glover, who I am very much looking forward to working with. It is important that we work on this in cherishing landscapes—it is a vital part of what the countryside can do for all of us.

I return to the committee's recommendation. Many of your Lordships have expressed disappointment in the Government's response. I want to spend a little time on this. As we set out in our response to the report, while we agree about objectives, we think there is a different way forward. I am mindful of what my noble friend Lord Haselhurst and the noble Earl, Lord Devon, said about this matter. We want to place rural areas at the heart of policy development, not treat them as a land apart. We want to ensure that policy can respond effectively and flexibly to a rapidly changing world and is not caged within a fixed framework. Although the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, may not think he said it, I think he was going along on some of those themes of needing flexibility and effectiveness.

One of the privileges of my role is to see many parts of the countryside. The noble Lord, Lord Foster, and his committee's report were absolutely right to say that each is distinct and many need different solutions. We therefore want to empower rural communities to define their own ambitions and decide what is right for their

circumstances, not to impose a central template on them. In short, as I have always said, I want us to be the helping hand, not a heavy one.

That is why our strategic approach is based on rural-proofing. This offers a flexible and dynamic way to keep rural concerns at the heart of policy development across government. Many of your Lordships raised this, including the noble Lord, Lord Carter, and my noble friend Lord Caithness. I will particularly emphasise what the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, said, as he has had so much to do with rural-proofing and helped us with earlier versions.

I have said before that rural-proofing is not an academic exercise. It is about achieving real benefits for those who live and work in rural areas. It ensures that policies are designed with the needs and challenges of rural areas in mind, so as to deliver the best possible outcomes. I think that is very much what the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, raised. As the committee's report noted and the Government set out in its evidence, there are good examples of rural-proofing. However, we accept that more needs to be done, which is why we are taking further action to strengthen it.

We have now nominated rural leads in each department. These departmental leads regularly meet Defra officials to ensure that rural-proofing is at the heart of the policy agenda. We are looking to improve the rural-proofing guidance for departments and we are building up the evidence base on rural needs through research projects, the work of our in-house statisticians, and our rural academic panel.

When the previous Secretary of State and I gave evidence to the committee earlier this year, we were quite rightly challenged on the effectiveness of rural-proofing. This led us to think about how we could improve the governance around it. In our response to the committee, we therefore said that we would set up a rural affairs board. This is now up and running and held its first meeting last month. Chaired by Lizzie Noel, a Defra non-executive director, with whom I look forward to working closely, the board will support and steer our work on rural-proofing. This approach clearly requires effective engagement with rural stakeholders. I would like to see a good, two-way flow of information. As has been raised, we shall publish an annual report on rural proofing to improve transparency.

I hope I can reassure not only the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, but the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London: our aim is to publish this report a year after our response to the committee. I place enormous importance on rural-proofing—it is the route to getting this right. We believe that, together, these measures will ensure that it works more effectively.

The committee's report touched on all aspects of rural life: skills, education, housing, health services, tourism, transport and crime. I am afraid so many points were raised that I will not be able to do full justice to them, with respect to the breadth of the report.

My noble friend Lord Caithness mentioned crime. Tomorrow, I will be visiting farms that are concerned about rural crime. The noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, spoke of health, transport, age, Acre—I am so pleased to be part of that team—and the rural community councils.

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

I am very pleased that the noble Baroness also mentioned loneliness, as I am the ministerial representative on that ministerial task force.

The noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, mentioned post offices, as did the noble Lord, Lord Cameron. I place great importance on the work of post offices and of having hubs in every village. This matter was also raised by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London in relation to the importance of health.

Many of your Lordships mentioned connectivity. We all know that it is one of the most important features to get right. The noble Lord, Lord Carter, the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, and others raised that this is an area on which we have to work. I am horrified by the 87 calls that the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, had to endure, knowing her part of Herefordshire. We want to improve digital connectivity and have introduced the “outside-in” approach as part of a future telecoms infrastructure review precisely because we want to ensure that rural communities do not continue to be disadvantaged.

There are many points to make on hard-to-reach areas. We have introduced the USO—universal service obligation—from next March for those premises that do not have access to decent broadband. I want to place on record—I hope it will please the right reverend Prelate—the great work of DCMS, Defra and the Bishops and others who I have been working with; the Church of England accord has meant that many villages have been able to use church infrastructure to help improve connectivity.

Of course, more must be done. The Prime Minister has set out his ambition very strongly. The Government are now working out the policy and regulatory changes that are necessary to enable faster deployment of broadband across the country. That includes my noble friend Lord Colgrain in Kent. I am mindful of that, and mindful that the Chancellor has already announced that £5 billion will be spent on gigabit connectivity to underpin that “outside-in” approach.

I was very struck, interestingly, by the fact that I think my noble friend Lady McIntosh was the only speaker to specifically mention mobile. Again, this is an area where we need to improve connectivity. We are committed to extending geographical mobile coverage to 95% of the UK, as well as providing an uninterrupted mobile signal on all major roads, and we are considering all of the options available to facilitate this. We clearly need to do more. The Government believe firmly that rural areas should not be left behind during the rollout of 5G services. Two of the six projects that were selected last year in the first phase of funding for 5G trials focused on rural areas.

On housing, I declare a personal interest in so far as I facilitated a rural housing scheme at Kimble many years ago, so this is strongly in my thoughts. I am delighted that the noble Baronesses, Lady Warwick of Undercliffe and Lady Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville, the noble Earl, Lord Devon, and others emphasised that decent, affordable homes are the bedrock of any community, but especially of small rural communities where even a handful of new homes can make a difference. I remember opening a rural housing scheme

in Buckinghamshire. That rural housing scheme next to the village school ensured that six children were immediately on the school roll. What more could any parish council want than to encourage that? I say to the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, that during Rural Housing Week I held a discussion with leading stakeholders and senior officials from MHCLG because we need to work in seeking to remove continuing barriers to progress

I turn now to business support. It is essential that rural businesses are able to access easily the support, skills and finance that they need. The committee was concerned that not all LEPs took their rural interests seriously. One point has very much come up in my discussions. The noble Earl, Lord Devon, referred to positivity in relation to what was happening in Devon. The noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, referred to concerns about other local enterprise partnerships. We expect LEP boards to ensure that their growth strategies are relevant, representative and widely supported across their whole geography—I emphasise, their whole geography. It is worth noting that 12 local enterprise partnerships have now appointed a board member with explicit responsibility for rural issues. Furthermore, Defra officials are working closely with BEIS, MHCLG and other departments to support the LEPs’ analysis of opportunities for their rural areas. With respect to the UK’s shared prosperity fund, rural-proofing means that it is shared. I say to the noble Lords, Lord Carter and Lord Grantchester, that we all know that SMEs are the lifeblood of the rural economy. They are where many of our great enterprises have been established. I do not have time to talk about the agri-drinks sector, but we all know what that sector presents.

I am under the cosh of time, but I want to say that your Lordships have highlighted the strength and diversity of rural England as well as the profound challenges our rural areas face. Having been to the Kent County Show, I was struck by my noble friend Lord Colgrain talking about “agri, horti and viti” cultural matters. I was pleased to have a positive meeting with a former Minister in the Department for Education about the importance of traditional rural skills. His commentary has triggered me to have a further conversation about those matters.

I say to my noble friends Lady Rock and Lady McIntosh that, on tenancy reforms, Defra has published a consultation in April this year. We seek views on options. The consultation closed in July and we are analysing the response.

I return to rurality in its more heady sense. This place provides treasured landscapes. Each rural community is unique and they all have great potential. The Government, and all of us, want to boost their best efforts. Perhaps the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, with her housing expertise will identify with what I want to emphasise, as indeed may all your Lordships: we want our villages to be multigenerational. They work best when they are multigenerational, when people look out for each other, whether within families or not. I believe that is the way we can pursue prosperity, not only of a financial nature, but in terms of well-being, contentment and the best approach to ensuring that people are physically and mentally well; it is the way to

ensure that people in the countryside have fulfilling lives, wherever in that great diversity they live, whether in the very sparsely populated areas of Northumberland or the Welsh Marches, or whether closer, as in west Kent. All these are places we should cherish because of their diversity.

We would all do well to remember how much we depend on our rural communities—the noble Earl, Lord Devon, the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, and the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, in particular raised this. Across the country, whether people live in towns or suburban areas, it is essential that we recognise what rural communities do, and what they can do, to protect and improve our environment, from securing clean and abundant water on which all life depends to supplying the high-welfare, high-quality, nutritious British food which is prized at home and abroad.

My noble friend the Duke of Montrose mentioned the food strategy. This is something that Henry Dimbleby is progressing and it is about from farm to fork. The review is currently asking for evidence and the call for evidence closes on 25 October, so I very much hope that my noble friend will encourage others to contribute to it. We are looking forward to publishing those findings in the summer of 2020.

So many points were raised and—candidly—I have not done them justice. We should have had a five-hour debate to go through all these things. I reiterate my acknowledgement of the noble Lord, Lord Foster of Bath, and all the committee most warmly. Giving evidence to the committee was rather like playing tennis with someone much better than oneself; it raises one's game. The former Secretary of State and I really found it compelling. It was quality time, even though it was quite challenging. I want to acknowledge that, because it is terribly important that these committees, their reports and their work do not gather dust. I assure your Lordships that the rural affairs board had a lot to do with the grilling we received, and it is very important that I should acknowledge that.

I hope this debate will have left no one in any doubt about the importance of the rural economy for our national quality of life. That is why the Government are committed to supporting vibrant rural economies and the businesses that are at the beating heart of our rural economy. I have not mentioned Brexit, candidly because your Lordships have had many discussions about Brexit, this week and before, and I am sure they will continue. As a farmer, I am well aware of the challenges and of what may happen. That is why the Government will be standing by and will act to help. As the Rural Affairs Minister, I want to do all I can to ensure that rural communities continue to grow and flourish and I know that your Lordships share that ambition.

7.42 pm

Lord Foster of Bath: My Lords, no one can doubt the passion and enthusiasm of the Minister, and I suspect that he and the committee are far closer than the Government's response would suggest. Indeed, I suspect it is the rest of government that we need to persuade.

I thank all members of the committee and all other noble Lords for their contributions to what has been a very encouraging debate, in the sense of supporting many of the things that we have said in our report. The disappointing thing is that the majority of Members of your Lordships' House want to see a rural strategy, but the Government currently do not. Prorogation is about to be upon us. It is the ending of something, but it also heralds the beginning of something new: a new Queen's Speech, a new Budget and possibly even a new Government. Let us hope this will bring about new thinking on the importance of having a comprehensive rural strategy, whatever Government we have. I thank all noble Lords for their contributions and I beg to move.

Motion agreed.

Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill [HL]

Returned from the Commons

The Bill was returned from the Commons agreed to.

7.43 pm

Sitting suspended.

Royal Commission

7.54 pm

The Lords Commissioners were: Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Lord Fowler, Lord Newby, Lord Judge, Baroness Smith of Basildon

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords, it not being convenient for Her Majesty personally to be present here this day, she has been pleased to cause a Commission under the Great Seal to be prepared for proroguing this present Parliament.

When the Commons were present at the Bar, the Lord Privy Seal continued:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, Her Majesty, not thinking fit to be personally present here at this time, has been pleased to cause a Commission to be issued under the Great Seal, and thereby given Her Royal Assent to divers Acts which have been agreed upon by both Houses of Parliament, the Titles whereof are particularly mentioned, and by the said Commission has commanded us to declare and notify Her Royal Assent to the said several Acts, in the presence of you the Lords and Commons assembled for that purpose; and has also assigned to us and other Lords directed full power and authority in Her Majesty's name to prorogue this present Parliament. Which commission you will now hear read.

A Commission for Royal Assent and Prorogation was read:

Elizabeth The Second, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, To Our right trusty and right well-beloved the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and to Our trusty and well-beloved the Knights Citizens and Burgesses of the House of Commons in this present Parliament assembled, Greeting:

[BARONESS EVANS OF BOWES PARK]

Forasmuch as in Our said Parliament diverse Acts have been agreed upon by you Our loving Subjects the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons, the short Titles of which are set forth in the Schedule hereto but the said Acts are not of force and effect in the Law without Our Royal Assent, and forasmuch as We cannot at this time be present in the Higher House of Our said Parliament, being the accustomed place for giving Our Royal Assent to such Acts as have been agreed upon by you Our said Subjects the Lords and Commons, We have therefore caused these Our Letters Patent to be made and have signed them and by them do give Our Royal Assent to the said Acts, Willing that the said Acts shall be of the same strength, force and effect as if We had been personally present in the said Higher House and had publicly and in the presence of you all assented to the same, commanding also Our well-beloved and faithful Counsellor Robert James Buckland, Chancellor of Great Britain, to seal these Our Letters with the Great Seal of Our Realm and also commanding The Most Reverend Father in God Our faithful Counsellor Justin Portal Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan, Our well-beloved and faithful Counsellors

Robert James Buckland, Chancellor of Great Britain
Peter Norman Lord Fowler, Lord Speaker
Natalie Jessica Baroness Evans of Bowes Park,
Lord Privy Seal
Richard Mark, Lord Newby
Igor, Lord Judge
Angela Evans, Baroness Smith of Basildon

or any three or more of them to declare this Our Royal Assent in the said Higher House in the presence of you the said Lords and Commons and the Clerk of Our Parliaments to endorse the said Acts in Our name as is requisite and to record these Our Letters Patent and the said Acts in manner accustomed and We do declare that after this Our Royal Assent given and declared as is aforesaid then and immediately the said Acts shall be taken and accepted as a good and perfect Acts of Parliament and be put in due execution accordingly.

And whereas We did lately for divers difficult and pressing affairs concerning Us the State and defence of Our United Kingdom and Church ordain this Our present Parliament to begin and be holden at Our City of Westminster the thirteenth day of June in the sixty-sixth year of Our Reign, on which day Our said Parliament was begun and holden and is there now holden, Know Ye that for certain pressing causes and considerations Us especially moving We have thought fit to prorogue Our said Parliament.

We therefore confiding very much in the fidelity, prudence and circumspection of you Our Commissioners aforesaid have by the advice and consent of Our Council assigned you Our Commissioners giving to you or any three or more of you by virtue of these Presents full power and authority in Our name to prorogue and continue Our present Parliament at Our City of Westminster aforesaid from Tuesday the eighth day of October until and unto Monday the fourteenth day of October there then to be holden, and we command you that you diligently attend the premises and effectually fulfil them in manner aforesaid We also strictly Command

all and singular Our Archbishops, Bishops, Lords, Baronets, Knights Citizens and Burgesses and all others whom it concerns to meet at Our said Parliament by virtue of these Presents that they observe, obey and assist you in executing the premises as they ought to do, In Witness whereof We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent witness Ourselves at Westminster the eighth day of October in the sixty-eighth year of Our Reign, by The Queen Herself signed with Her own Hand.

The Lord Privy Seal continued:

My Lords, in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, and by virtue of the Commission which has been now read, we do declare and notify to you, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in Parliament assembled, that Her Majesty has given Her Royal Assent to the Acts in the Commission mentioned; and the Clerks are required to pass the same in the usual Form and Words.

Royal Assent

8.10 pm

The following Acts were given Royal Assent:

Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act,
Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Act.

Prorogation: Her Majesty's Speech

8.11 pm

Her Majesty's most gracious Speech was then delivered to both Houses of Parliament by the Lord Privy Seal, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command, as follows.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, my Government's legislative programme has laid the foundations for the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union while pursuing wide-ranging domestic reform.

Landmark legislation was passed, and has now been commenced, to repeal the European Communities Act. Other laws are in place to enable the United Kingdom's smooth exit from the European Union, establishing new arrangements on international sanctions, nuclear safeguards, customs, and reciprocal healthcare arrangements. Over 600 Statutory Instruments have been made to ensure a functioning statute book following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

The stability and strength of the union that joins England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has been at the forefront of my Government's agenda. Preserving and promoting the social, economic and cultural bonds that unite this nation remains of the utmost importance to my Government. My Government continues to work to ensure that locally-accountable politicians can take decisions in Northern Ireland at the earliest opportunity.

It has been an enduring focus of my Government to strengthen the economy to support the creation of jobs and to generate the tax revenues needed to invest in the National Health Service, schools and other public services. Improving public finances, while keeping taxes low, has been a priority for my Government. Legislation passed this session has provided one hundred percent relief from business rates for agricultural nurseries and, for a period of five years from April 2017, properties used for the purpose of new fibre infrastructure.

My Government has set out a programme of work to improve productivity and help businesses create high quality, well paid jobs across the United Kingdom. In 2019, more than a million workers benefited from the largest increase to the National Living Wage since it was first introduced. My ministers have worked to attract investment in infrastructure to support economic growth. Legislation has been passed to ensure that the United Kingdom remains a world leader in new industries, including electric cars and commercial satellites.

My Government has continued to support international action against climate change, including implementation of the Paris Agreement. Recognising the need for bold steps to protect the planet, a commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 was enshrined in law, making the United Kingdom the first major economy to do so.

Draft legislation was published which will establish a new body to ensure the United Kingdom's high environmental standards are maintained and to protect and improve the environment for future generations. My Government has legislated to protect animals, including bans on the sale of ivory, puppies and kittens by commercial third parties and the use of wild animals in travelling circuses in England.

Voyeurism offences have been recognised as the crimes that they are and legislation has been passed to ensure the courts have powers to take swift action to protect children who are identified as at risk of female genital mutilation.

In presenting the long-term plan for the National Health Service in England, my Government strengthened its commitment to ensuring there is a world-class health system that supports everyone from birth, through the challenges that life brings, and into old age. My Government is committed to ensuring mental health support is available to all who need it and to protecting the fundamental human rights of the most vulnerable in society. Legislation enacted this session will increase access to protections and put in place robust safeguards for those who are deprived of their liberty.

In recognition of the need to make renting fairer and more affordable, and to promote fairness and transparency in the housing market, legislation has been enacted to reduce costs at the outset of, and throughout a tenancy, by banning most letting fees paid by tenants in England.

My Government has taken steps to ensure fairer markets and to protect consumers from unfair practices and financial losses. Legislation has been passed to ensure people have access to free and impartial financial guidance and debt advice and to introduce a ban on nuisance calls in relation to pensions. Measures have

been enacted to reduce insurance costs for motorists by tackling the high number and cost of whiplash claims.

The security of the nation and its citizens remains of the highest importance to my Government. In this session, legislation has been passed to ensure the police and security services have the powers they need to keep the population safe in the face of evolving threats of terrorism.

Legislation passed this session marks a significant step towards my Government's commitment to tackle serious violence on the streets of the United Kingdom. Laws are now in place to prevent young people from purchasing dangerous weapons and to prosecute those who possess such items, or sell them without imposing rigorous age verification.

The defence of the Realm remains an utmost priority for my Government, which it has supported through investment in our gallant Armed Forces.

As a leading member of the international coalition against Daesh, the United Kingdom played a critical role in the military defeat of Daesh's so-called caliphate in March of this year. While the Middle East continues to suffer from serious conflict, my Government has played a leading role in de-escalating regional tensions. My Government has also played a key role in international efforts to protect the United Kingdom and its allies from hostile threats, including in response to the chemical weapon attack in Salisbury.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, my Government has provided political and diplomatic support to peace efforts in Yemen, Libya and Syria, as well as mitigating the human cost of these tragedies through the provision of substantial humanitarian assistance.

Prince Philip and I were pleased to welcome Their Majesties King Felipe and Queen Letizia of Spain and we also welcomed King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the President and First Lady of the United States of America, on State Visits.

Prince Charles and I were delighted to attend a national commemorative event to honour and remember the heroism, courage and sacrifice of the many servicemen and women who participated in the D-Day Landings.

Members of the House of Commons, I thank you for the provisions which you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public services.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to the 14th day of October, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Monday, the 14th day of October.

Parliament was prorogued at 8.20 pm.

Volume 799
No. 352

Tuesday
8 October 2019

CONTENTS

Tuesday 8 October 2019
