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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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The abbreviation [V] after a Member's name indicates that they contributed by video call.

The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

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

No party affiliation is given for Members serving the House in a formal capacity or for the Lords spiritual.

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House of Lords

Thursday 18 July 2024

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham.

Introduction: Lord Vallance of Balham

11.07 am

Sir Patrick John Thompson Vallance, KCB, having been created Lord Vallance of Balham, of Balham in the London Borough of Wandsworth, was introduced and made the solemn affirmation, supported by Baroness Jones of Whitchurch and Baroness Manningham-Buller, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Introduction: Baroness Smith of Malvern

11.13 am

The right honourable Jacqueline Jill Smith, having been created Baroness Smith of Malvern, of Malvern in the County of Worcestershire, was introduced and took the oath, supported by Baroness Morris of Yardley and Baroness Merron, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Oaths and Affirmations

11.18 am

Several noble Lords took the oath or made the solemn affirmation, and signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

11.22 am

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, for the convenience of the House, I will make a statement about upcoming recess dates, sitting Fridays, Oral Questions and today's business. I will save noble Lords' time in rushing to write these dates down, as a notice setting them out will shortly go out from me to all Peers; there will also be copies in the Royal Gallery and the Printed Paper Office.

Before I do that I should say, as noble Lords are aware, that I served as the Opposition Chief Whip for three years in the previous Parliament and, in that role, as part of the usual channels. I pay tribute to everyone I worked with during that period including our much-loved and much-missed dear friend Lord Judge. The noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, took over his role as Convenor of the Cross-Bench Peers and it has been a pleasure to work with him. I have always had an

excellent working relationship with the noble Lord, Lord Stoneham of Droxford, the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip.

As Government Chief Whip, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, had the important job, among many others, of getting the Government's business through the House. She did this with great skill, respect and courtesy, in the best traditions of the House and as the House expects relations between different parties and groups to be conducted. I thank her very much for that, as I thank everybody who has been part of our discussions, including officials, both Civil Service and political, who supported us all in the usual channels.

As part of the usual channels in my new role, I hope to continue as I have in my previous 14 years' membership of this House, with respect, courtesy, a smile and a willingness to engage with all Members.

On recess dates, I want to be as helpful to the House as possible, which is why I intend to cover dates until we return in the new year and all sitting Fridays until the end of the year. I will announce as many other dates as I can when we return in the autumn or no later than when we come back after the Conference Recess.

The recess dates until January, subject to the progress of business, will be as follows. We will rise for the Summer Recess at the end of business on Tuesday 30 July. We will return on Monday 2 September. We expect to break for the Conference Recess at the end of business on Friday 13 September and return, after party conferences, on Monday 7 October. There will be the usual long weekend in November, with a short adjournment from the end of business on Wednesday 6 November and the House returning on Monday 11 November. I expect the Christmas Recess to start at the end of business on Thursday 19 December; the House will return in the new year on Monday 6 January.

We are sitting on Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 July. The Table Office will now open a ballot for Oral Questions on those days. Members will be able to enter it after this announcement. The ballot will be conducted tomorrow at 1 pm.

On sitting Fridays, it is my intention to enable as much debate as possible on issues of importance to the House, including Private Members' Bills. We therefore intend to sit on the following Fridays: 19 July for the debate on the humble Address; 26 July for debates on Select Committee reports; 6 and 13 September to progress Private Members' Bills; 18 October and 15 November also to progress Private Members' Bills; 6 December for the annual debate led by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury; and 13 December for Private Members' Bills. I will update the House as early as possible on any future dates.

On today's proceedings, I remind the House that the Motions on the recent report of the Conduct Committee to be moved by the noble Baroness, Lady Manningham-Buller, are not debatable.

Finally, I highlight that there is a nine-minute advisory speaking time for Back-Bench contributions to today's debate on the humble Address. That means that, when noble Lords reach eight minutes, they should start

[LORD KENNEDY OF SOUTHWARK]
winding up. When they have reached nine minutes, time is up. The Government Whips on the Front Bench will, if necessary, ask Members to bring their remarks to a close. On subsequent days, the speaking time is likely to be shorter, reflecting the relative size of the speakers' lists. I ask all Members to respect those advisory times to ensure fairness across the debate and that the House can rise at an orderly time.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): In the timetable that my noble friend the Government Chief Whip has just set out, would it be possible for the House to have a proper day's debate on the Covid inquiry report, which is due to be published in about half an hour? This is clearly of exceptional importance and the whole nation should take it extremely seriously.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): I thank my noble friend for that question. I am sure we can find time to debate those important issues, but I cannot give him a time at the moment, from the Dispatch Box.

Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con): My Lords, I will be brief, as I always expected people to be when we were in government, but I will just respond in kind to the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy—now the Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms. I am sure he will do a fine job, as he will as Government Chief Whip. We followed each other through the DCLG and the Home Office and then as Chief Whips on our respective sides. I think the relationship has been built on trust and respect. I would describe it as a marriage of sorts: we row in private and keep it all fine in public. I thank him for his kind words and just reiterate that point: what we expected in government we will abide by in opposition.

Lord Stoneham of Droxford (LD): My Lords, I join in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, on his appointment. I look forward to working with him on the Government Benches. I also pay tribute to the former Government Chief Whip, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams. Over the last couple of years, we have had a remarkably good relationship despite all the votes that we have had. I pay tribute to the way that she has conducted business through the usual channels. Obviously, we are continuing to work with the Cross Benches. Over the last few years, this has been an extremely good relationship, despite the record number of votes that we have had. I thank everybody who has been involved.

The Earl of Kinnoull (CB): My Lords, Lord Judge used to say there is no such thing as a speech too short; I will keep to that. It has always been a great pleasure to work with the Chief Whip: he is the first person to bring the smile out that he was describing, and he has been highly effective in the role now occupied by the former Chief Whip, who I would say has been equally effective, together with the Chief Whip of the Liberal Democrats. Those three have been very generous to the Cross-Benchers, particularly in providing us with more spaces on committees, which

we asked for. I thank them for that. We are lucky to be served by usual channels that are operating greatly to the House's benefit.

Arbitration Bill [HL] *First Reading*

11.31 am

A Bill to amend the Arbitration Act 1996.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill [HL] *First Reading*

11.32 am

A Bill to make provision about recapitalisation costs in relation to the special resolution regime under the Banking Act 2009.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Kennedy of Southwark (on behalf of Lord Livermore), read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill [HL] *First Reading*

11.32 am

A Bill to make provision about the status of, and privileges and immunities in connection with, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the International Committee of the Red Cross; and for connected purposes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Collins of Highbury, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Conduct Committee *Motion to Agree*

11.33 am

Moved by Baroness Manningham-Buller

That the Report from the Select Committee *The conduct of Lord Ranger of Northwood* (4th Report, Session 2023-24, HL Paper 117) be agreed to.

Baroness Manningham-Buller (CB): My Lords, I beg to move that the report of the Conduct Committee, *The Conduct of Lord Ranger of Northwood*, be agreed to. I regret coming to the House so early in the new Parliament and, indeed, delaying the start of the substantive debate on His Majesty's gracious Speech. That said, there was agreement across the usual channels that the House should consider this Motion as soon as

possible. It relates to a report published by the Conduct Committee on 17 May. At the time of publication, the plan was to bring the report to the House in early June. The Dissolution intervened, and the alternative to taking the report now would be to wait until the autumn. Such a drawn-out process would not be fair to either the noble Lord, Lord Ranger of Northwood, or the two complainants.

In brief, the report relates to an incident of bullying and harassment which took place in January in the Strangers' Bar in the House of Commons. I shall not rehearse the details; these are all set out in the report and not disputed by the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, but there is no question that this was a serious case of bullying behaviour, fuelled by alcohol, which has had a serious effect on the two young women who were its victims.

Taking these factors into account, your Lordships' Conduct Committee agreed unanimously that the sanction originally recommended by the Commissioner for Standards of a one-week suspension failed to do justice to the seriousness of the offence. We therefore recommend a three-week suspension. We have also recommended that the noble Lord, Lord Ranger, be denied access to bars in the House of Lords and the service of alcohol for a period of 12 months. If this report is agreed today, the Commons authorities will be invited to consider whether to impose a similar measure in facilities administered by that House.

I conclude by acknowledging that, given the recess dates that have just been announced by the Government Chief Whip, the final week of the three-week suspension will fall in the Summer Recess. This is not ideal, but we are unlikely to have three clear sitting weeks from now until October and, as I have said, waiting another three months would not be fair to any of the parties in this case. I beg to move.

Motion agreed.

Motion to Resolve

Moved by Baroness Manningham-Buller

That, in accordance with Standing Order 11, Lord Ranger of Northwood be suspended from the service of the House for a period of three weeks; and that, in accordance with section 1 of the House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015, in the opinion of this House, the conduct giving rise to this resolution occurred after the coming into force of that Act.

Motion agreed.

Committee of Selection

Membership Motion

11.36 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That in accordance with Standing Order 62 a Committee of Selection be appointed to select and propose to the House the names of the members to

form each select committee of the House (except the Committee of Selection itself and any committee otherwise provided for by statute or by order of the House) or any other body not being a select committee referred to it by the Senior Deputy Speaker, and the panel of Deputy Chairmen of Committees; and that the following members together with the Senior Deputy Speaker be appointed to the Committee:

Bichard, L., Geddes, L., Jones, L., Kennedy of Southwark, L., Kinnoull, E., Newby, L., Smith of Basildon, B., Stoneham of Droxford, L., True, L., Williams of Trafford, B.

Motion agreed.

King's Speech

Debate (2nd Day)

Principal topics for debate: Energy, the environment and housing

11.36 am

Moved on Wednesday 17 July by Lord Reid of Cardowan

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty as follows:

“Most Gracious Sovereign—We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, beg leave to thank Your Majesty for the most gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament”.

The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) (Lab): My Lords, it is a great honour for me to open our six-day debate on the gracious Speech. I start by thanking my predecessor at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the noble Lord, Lord Callanan, for his contribution to the department and his considerable efforts to keep noble Lords informed and debate vigorously with them. I also very much welcome the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, who is making his maiden speech during our debate. I am sure that it will be the first of many important contributions.

Since I was last a Minister in what was the Department of Energy and Climate Change, 14 years have passed. While the office still looks familiar—and the Secretary of State is certainly familiar—the challenges we face are undoubtedly more profound. The vulnerabilities in our energy system have been laid bare by Putin's invasion of Ukraine and his weaponisation of international fossil fuel markets. Families are still in a cost of living crisis, exacerbated by energy bills that remain high. There is also a deep and urgent demand for good jobs, good houses and good economic opportunities across the UK, particularly in former industrial heartlands, which feel like they have been left behind in recent years. All the while, the climate crisis is no longer a future threat: it is happening right now, all around us. We are seeing the effect of warming in droughts, wildfires and floods across the world, and feeling it in extreme temperatures, with June this year the 13th consecutive month to set a record global high.

[LORD HUNT OF KINGS HEATH]

As was set out in the gracious Speech, the Government are on a mission to address these challenges. At the heart of that mission is the plan to make Britain a clean energy superpower. If we want to wean ourselves off our dependence on fossil fuels and become more energy secure, we need clean energy. If we want to tackle the cost of living crisis and make sure that British people feel better off, we need to harness our domestic potential for cheap clean energy. If we want skilled jobs with good wages, bringing a new wave of prosperity to every corner of the country, we need an industrial strategy focused on clean energy. If we want to halt climate change and protect our planet, we need clean energy.

Instead of having to choose between security, sustainability and affordability—what is known as the energy trilemma—we have an extraordinary opportunity to boost all three by investing in clean energy at speed and scale. That is why the Government are focused on achieving clean electricity by 2030, with a system based on renewables and nuclear power, and then building on that momentum to achieve the ultimate goal of net zero by 2050, which means we will then be no longer adding to the total amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and therefore no longer contributing to climate change.

The Great British Energy Bill, put forward in the gracious Speech, will establish a publicly owned company to spearhead our mission to become a clean energy superpower. Headquartered in Scotland, Great British Energy will encourage, own and develop clean energy projects of all sizes across the country. It is highly unlikely that the scale and pace of investment required to decarbonise the electricity system could be achieved by the private sector alone within the current institutional and policy framework. This new public energy company, alongside additional electricity market reforms, can provide the spark we need, supporting and encouraging private investment. Working in conjunction with industry, Great British Energy will help substantially expand our renewable capacity by the end of this decade.

The Bill will establish GBE, which will develop, own and operate assets, investing in partnership with the private sector, and will have a capitalisation of £8.3 billion of new money over the lifetime of this Parliament. Through these investments, GBE will take a stake for the British people in projects and supply chains that accelerate technologies for the future, reaping benefits at home in cheap clean power and securing Britain at the front of the global race for technology, which has such major global export potential.

GBE will also facilitate, encourage and participate in the production, distribution, storage and supply of clean energy, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from energy produced by fossil fuels, as well as measures for furthering the transition to clean energy and improving energy efficiency. The Bill gives the Secretary of State the ability to provide GBE with the financial backing needed to meet its aims and ambitions. The Secretary of State will be required under the Bill to prepare a strategic priority statement for GBE, to ensure it focuses its effort on government priorities. GBE will also, of course, accelerate ground-breaking new developments, with public investment

helping to crowd in investment from the private sector and supporting the development of municipal and community energy.

Renewables are not only greener but the fastest to deploy, cheapest to build and operate, and more secure. A renewables-led system is the cheapest foundation for a decarbonised grid. It also gives us energy security, because renewables are not sold on markets controlled by foreign powers. By accelerating the clean energy transition, GBE will not just put us firmly on track for net zero but will boost our energy security and create those skilled jobs we need. Further, it will ensure that electricity bills are no longer exposed to the kinds of gas price shocks that helped to drive increases in the electricity price cap of over £1,300 for a typical household during winter 2022-23.

GBE will work alongside our new mission control centre, which is exactly what it sounds like—a strategic hub in government that will set out the path, and monitor and drive our progress, to reaching clean power by 2030. It will draw upon the unique expertise of industry leaders, in a format unprecedented in government, bringing together the best possible people to shape how we achieve decarbonised electricity. I share the Secretary of State's delight in having such a credible expert at the helm in Chris Stark, the former chief executive of the Climate Change Committee.

If anyone needed proof of the pace at which this Government are willing to move, they need look only at the lifting of the onshore wind ban, after just 72 hours. Onshore wind accounts for roughly a quarter of all electricity generated from renewables. We already have a strong pipeline of projects in the planning system, but planning and grid constraints in England and Wales mean we have seen little investment in onshore wind outside Scotland in recent years. We have removed the de facto ban in England by deleting onshore wind-specific planning tests that have been in the National Planning Policy Framework for almost a decade. What this essentially does is place onshore wind on the same footing as other energy developments.

We are very eager for communities to benefit from hosting local renewable energy infrastructure, which is why we will soon publish an update to the community benefits protocol for onshore wind in England.

We are building on the strategic spatial energy plan, which is being developed by the National Energy System Operator. This is about speeding up the rollout of clean power, giving more certainty to the planning and consenting process, and seeking to expand the use of spatial planning to other infrastructure sectors.

Work is under way on a host of other vital reforms, including energy system reform to ensure that our regulator can hold companies to account for wrongdoing, and the warm homes plan, which will offer grants and low-interest loans to support insulation, as well as the installation of solar panels, batteries and low-carbon heating. We will seek to extend the lifetime of existing nuclear power plants while supporting the completion of new sites, such as Sizewell C.

The Chancellor has already committed to a national wealth fund to drive investment in the industries of the future and create thousands of jobs in clean energy. This new national wealth fund task force will be led by

the people who know best, including the former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney, the CEO of Barclays Bank, and Aviva CEO, Dame Amanda Blanc.

I turn to the environment. At the heart of our net zero plans is, of course, a determination to protect our natural environment for generations to come. For too long our natural world has been destroyed, and our farmers and rural communities neglected. Action is needed to urgently reverse this damage and bring about lasting and positive results.

It is surely a national shame that there are record levels of sewage in our rivers, lakes and seas. Cleaning this up is a priority that can no longer be ignored. That is why we are bringing forward legislation this Session that will take the first important step towards substantial reform in the waste sector. We want to hold water companies to account, putting them under special measures through strengthened regulation, but there is much more that has to happen if we are to support economic growth and minimise environmental harm.

We are committed to creating a circular economy that uses our resources in a more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable way, creating a road map that will finally move Britain to a zero-waste economy. We recognise that food security is critical to our national security, so will be working hard to support our farmers and rural communities, and will do more to protect communities from the devastating damage that flooding causes.

We should surely be proud of our country's remarkable natural beauty, but the fact is that we are currently one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. So we will take action to meet the targets set out in the Environment Act and work in partnership with communities to restore and protect nature.

Another central pillar of the Government's agenda for change is housing. A safe, secure, affordable home is the foundation of a good life, but we know that for too many people it is increasingly out of reach. In hostels throughout the country, there are children in temporary accommodation. Couples are stuck living with parents, unable to move out and start a family, and millions of lives are put on hold because of the failure to address our housing emergency. This is holding us all back because new homes do not just provide families with security to make plans and get on but help create well-paid jobs, attract investment into local infrastructure and spark the economic growth that Britain desperately needs.

As some of the biggest contributors to our carbon emissions, homes also hold the key to a greener, cleaner future that brings down people's bills while doing our best for the planet. That is why we have made it a mission to get Britain building again with 1.5 million new homes across the country, including the biggest wave of affordable, social and council homes for a generation. These new homes will be energy efficient, with proper insulation to bring down bills. To achieve this, the Government are reintroducing local housing targets, reforming the National Planning Policy Framework, kick-starting the next generation of new towns and creating a new task force to accelerate stalled housing projects, including hiring 300 more planning officers. In doing this, we will focus on nature-friendly planning, starting with the development of

poor-quality grey-belt land—disused wasteland—and prioritising building on brownfield sites. We also need to address the real reasons that many people oppose homes being built in their neighbourhood, so we will make sure that more homes also means more doctors, more schools and better transport.

Government is often about making difficult decisions, and it can sometimes feel like a Catch-22 situation where every positive choice seems to involve some sort of push-back. The energy crisis is not a Catch-22. Nor is the need to protect our natural environment, nor the demand for good-quality housing. In all those areas we have an extraordinary opportunity at this time. By investing in clean energy, protecting our environment and building hundreds of thousands of good-quality homes, we can make ordinary working people better off and build a more secure and prosperous future for all. I beg to move.

11.52 am

Lord Roborough (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, on his appointment as Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. We have the utmost respect for his abilities and integrity, and I wish him well in his duties. I also congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on her appointment as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Her depth of knowledge and commitment to this area of government are clear. Indeed, I wish the whole of His Majesty's Government great success for the benefit of our country.

Before I begin, I would like to declare my relevant interests. I have a dairy farm, a solar farm and forestry, and I am a residential and agricultural landlord. I own land targeting development for new forestry planting, carbon sequestration, wind energy and residential housing. I am a director of a wind energy development company. I am an investor in companies developing technology for natural capital and carbon sequestration as well as global companies providing oilfield services and growing agricultural products.

Government investment decision-making does not have a good track record. Indeed, it is private capital that has driven the rollout of renewables and infrastructure in our country, and it appears that Great British Energy will be targeting investments that private capital alone will not finance. That does not fill our Benches with confidence that these investments will necessarily be judicious. Please can the Minister assure the House that GB Energy will report on the performance of its investments regularly and in detail and that the Government will be held accountable in this House for the performance of those investments?

The Government have committed to substantially increase the rate of renewables development. This would build on our track record of increasing renewable energy from 7% of our electricity supply in 2010 to around 50% today, versus 14% globally. However, these objectives clash with others in the Government's manifesto. How do we increase our food security while tripling solar capacity, which is often placed on some of our most fertile land in southern England? How do we restore and protect our natural environment if we

[LORD ROBOROUGH]
are installing gigawatts of wind turbines in the fragile and beautiful environments where the wind blows most consistently? How will these conflicting objectives be reconciled within the planning system while also protecting the interests of those who live and work in these areas?

There are two further challenges for renewables development. First, grid capacity and the ability of distribution network operators to process applications from developers remain significant constraints. I would like to understand how and when the Government plan to free these up. Secondly, cost inflation has significantly increased the levelised cost of electricity from new renewable developments, making it harder to compete with the marginal cost of electricity from gas turbines. How will the Government ensure that the incentives are effective for developers without penalising the consumer?

The Government have summarily ceased issuing new licences for exploration and production of oil and gas in the North Sea. This weakens our energy independence and threatens the 90,000 people employed directly by the oil and gas sector, often in local economies that rely on those jobs. At least another 100,000 jobs are reliant on this industry. Under our previous Government, with continued development, we expected oil and gas production to fall by 7% per annum, faster than the average global decline needed to align with the IPCC's 1.5 degrees Celsius pathway. Without new licensing, this will fall at an accelerating rate, increasing our reliance on imported oil and gas. The UK still depends on fossil fuels for meeting around 75% of our total energy demand, and that cannot be changed overnight. A Robert Gordon University study found that a faster decline in our oil and gas could halve this workforce by 2030 and would be a

"significant loss of skills for the future energy sector".

I would like the Minister to reassure this House and the 200,000 men and women dependent on this industry that they will find equally highly skilled and well-paid jobs and that we will not be held to ransom by foreign powers in future.

There is universal acceptance that the water industry can and must do better. The challenges are unchanged: the water and wastewater infrastructure was designed and built by our Victorian ancestors 150 years ago. The standards and capacity it was built to are obsolete. How will increasing the powers of the regulator change those facts? I remind the House that the previous Government had a fully funded plan to address the issues. In a few weeks, the Thames Tideway tunnel will be put to use after investment of more than £4 billion, despite much opposition in this House, significantly improving the quality of water in the Thames.

The Government's intention to develop a land use framework, which was not mentioned today but was stated in previous commitments, is in line with our plan, which was recently confirmed by my noble friend Lord Douglas-Miller at the Dispatch Box. It can and should allow for streamlining management and planning decisions. However, I would like the Minister to reassure the House that this will enable, rather than force, private landowners to pursue developments that the Government find desirable.

Families dependent on farming were disappointed with the lack of clarity or ambition around this Government's intentions towards farming, without any mention of it in His Majesty's gracious Speech. We had promised £1 billion of extra funding to farmers to support increased productivity while improving animal welfare and environmental standards. The year 2024 has been stressful for farmers due to extreme rainfall. What concrete reassurance can the Minister give that helping them remains a priority?

I sincerely hope that the Government can use the world-leading environment, agriculture and fisheries Acts to continue to drive the country to fulfil its legal commitment to reverse the declines in nature by 2030. Ministers in the last Government pushed Defra to act as enablers rather than regulators. Success requires land managers and farmers to be weaponised, in the words of my noble friend Lord Benyon. They are the ones who will sequester carbon, increase biodiversity and produce food more sustainably, not the Government.

This is about leveraging Defra resources to stimulate private sector green finance. I urge the Minister to continue to partner with the British Standards Institution on standards and excellent organisations such as the Green Finance Institute to see the UK as developing high-integrity accessible markets for land managers and investors. It is also important that our Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code should be certified with the excellent Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market's core carbon principles while also being admitted to the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

We should not overlook the massive international role that we have played in managing the environment under the previous Government. Defra's international biodiversity responsibilities were key to fulfilling what was agreed at COP 26 in Glasgow and at CBD COP 15 in Montreal—for example, our £500 million Blue Planet Fund, helping smaller countries to manage their coastal areas and oceans. Please could the Minister confirm that she will continue to work closely with colleagues at DESNZ and the FCDO to continue this leadership?

The Government described the badger cull as ineffective in their manifesto, but the reality is quite different, with a reduction of 51% in bovine TB in three regions of Cheshire between 2016 and 2023. My own dairy farm has gone from TB infections at least once every other year to three years TB-free since the badger cull. I am pleased that His Majesty's Government plan to continue working with farmers and scientists to eradicate bovine TB. A candidate vaccine, CattleBCG, has been identified, and the Animal and Plant Health Agency has developed a companion candidate test. Significant progress is being made, but I urge the Government not to abandon a proven strategy until there is complete confidence that a better solution is available.

I hope I have given sufficient evidence that the last Government were the greenest ever, leading the world in so many areas. We applaud the new Government's ambition to build and expand on that work while bolstering our food and energy security. We will support His Majesty's Government when they do good things, perhaps chiding them to do better and holding them to account when they fail.

I am very much looking forward to my noble friend Lord Fuller's maiden speech, no doubt the first of many meaningful contributions to this House.

12.02 pm

Earl Russell (LD): My Lords, I congratulate Labour on securing a historic win and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, on his appointment.

This Parliament has a powerful mandate for bold action to fight the climate emergency and ensure an unprecedented revolution in the deployment of renewable energy. We must ensure a return to the all-party consensus on climate change. This June marked the 12th consecutive month of global temperatures of 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels. Global sea surface temperatures have also breached the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold for each of the last 15 months. We are running out of time. Our global climate goals are melting before we transition away from fossil fuels.

Although the Conservatives passed a ground-breaking Climate Change Act and cut our CO₂ emissions to their lowest levels since 1879, ultimately Sunak prioritised the perceived electoral benefits of climate polarisation over climate action. Dither and delay and climate culture wars have meant that UK energy bills were £22 billion higher over the past decade than they would have been had we taken action earlier to rid ourselves of our overdependence on fossil fuels. Precious time, inward investment and our international reputation were all sacrificed.

The Climate Change Committee is clear that we are off course to meet the fifth and sixth rounds of our carbon budgets, particularly for heating and transport. Were someone to ask, "How would you get to net zero by 2050?", the answer would come back, "I would not start from here after nine years of Conservative government". Labour have made their job more difficult as well by deciding to cut their own £28 billion annual budget for climate change. I call on Labour to revisit these budget decisions. We have a historic opportunity to turn to the next chapter in the fight against climate change and transform the United Kingdom into the world's leading innovative and successful green economy.

The international frameworks, legislation and policy are all largely in place. The job of government is to implement change at an unprecedented pace and scale, and that means taking critical decisions and building lots of infrastructure. The initial signs are encouraging: in particular, the ending of the effective nine-year ban on new onshore wind farms, the launch of the National Wealth Fund, the approval of three big new solar farms and the masterful appointment of Chris Stark as the head of mission control. This is all good for our energy security, reducing energy bills and ensuring a future for humanity.

I am proud of my party's manifesto, which was judged by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth to be better than Labour's for the environment and nature. We on these Benches are committed to achieving net zero by 2045. I encourage Labour to be bold. As Ed Davey said, please steal our ideas, especially on tackling the failing water companies and the sewage scandal. We welcome Labour's plan to make the UK a clean energy superpower, doubling offshore wind, trebling

solar and quadrupling offshore wind, along with the Government's commitment to decarbonise our energy generation by 2030, including the creation of Great British Energy.

The Liberal Democrats have always been and will always be champions of renewable energy. The UK has the third-best wind resources in the world. Renewable energy is cheap and proven and has short delivery times. It provides energy security and lowers costs to consumers. It is entirely possible to decarbonise our power generation by 2030, but no nation has ever fully decarbonised their national power generation within such a short timeframe.

Success will require an intergovernmental approach across Whitehall, the devolved regions and local government. It will also involve rapid societal change not seen here since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. It means building a massive amount of infrastructure, equivalent to some seven times more over the next 10 years than was built over the previous three. The "how, not if" reforms to planning will need to be carefully balanced and communicated to ensure that we do not get bogged down in nimby infrastructure wars. The Government need to balance building with spatial strategies that include brownfield first and enhanced, larger geographical areas of nature protection.

The Government must make a number of key policy decisions urgently and set out a comprehensive policy programme. The solutions are well known: onshore and offshore wind power; rooftop solar; a huge home insulation programme; the delivery of affordable home heat pumps, the take-up of electric vehicles; a massive update to the grid and interconnectors, generating more power in the south, where it is consumed; and decisions on carbon capture and storage, medium and long-term power storage and how we get cheap energy to heavy industry and nuclear power.

We await the Bills and will scrutinise them carefully when they arrive to ensure that they work. We will hold Labour to account and push them to be ambitious. Great British Energy is welcome, but I encourage Labour to invest in community energy schemes, and I caution against an overreliance of nuclear projects that are often over budget and delivered late.

Adaptation and resilience is the bit that no one wants to talk about, but we can no longer afford to ignore it. From our health systems to urban planning, water infrastructure, transport, flood defences, the resilience of critical infrastructure, food security and the control of wildfires, there is little joined-up comprehensive thinking going on across government. The recommendations of the Adaptation Committee of the Climate Change Committee need to be fed into Whitehall and delivered across government.

The key to success in all these projects lies in the Government's ability to bring the public along for the transition. That requires providing real cost of living benefits to people early on. To make the green revolution work, it must provide jobs, wages and economic growth. The Government must work to provide the educated skills workforce required.

I believe passionately in the need for a just climate transition. It is essential that our citizens see tangible benefits. Another spike in the international energy markets could cost the UK an extra £50 billion.

[EARL RUSSELL]

We welcome Labour's foreign policy plans to establish co-ordinated global action on climate change. I want Labour to form ever-closer relations with Europe, and to see a return to having shared environmental standards with the EU. Global finance mitigation and adaptation will be key issues at COP 29. This is an ideal opportunity for the Labour Government to show leadership. We encourage His Majesty's Government to act with speed, but to bring society with them.

12.09 pm

Baroness Hayman (CB): My Lords, I declare my interest as chair of Peers for the Planet. It is obviously on topics related to that role that I will mainly speak today, but I hope the House will indulge me on just a couple of sentences on House of Lords reform, as evidently I will not be able to participate in Tuesday's debate.

I am glad that the Government's manifesto set out a commitment to a smaller House and to ensuring that those who populate it will be appointed because of their ability and commitment to making a real contribution to our work. The Bill we were promised yesterday will obviously help those commitments by reducing the size of the House and ending a pathway to membership which simply is not acceptable in the 21st century. But when we look at the issue of the contribution which Members make, the effects of that Bill will inevitably make us consider whether some nuance may be needed, and that need to balance objectives will become even more apparent if we look at a hard-stop age limit on membership.

I much welcome the tone of the Leader of the House's remarks yesterday. I hope that the House will be given an opportunity to work out the best and most effective way to reduce its size further, the need for which I am in no doubt, but without damaging its effectiveness as a scrutinising and revising Chamber or sacrificing expertise and experience. I am tempted to pursue the analogy of babies and bathwater, but in discussing an age limit of 80 that is perhaps not appropriate. What is essential—I hope the new Government will look urgently and seriously at this—is a cap on the overall size of the House and the concomitant reduction of the absolute power of prerogative which currently lies with the Prime Minister. That cap and a statutory appointments commission are, in my view, essential building blocks to ensure an effectively functioning second Chamber in which we can justifiably take pride.

Turning to the substance of today's debate, I have a list of welcomes: a welcome for the recognition in the gracious Speech of

"the urgency of the global climate challenge and the new ... opportunities that can come from leading the development of the technologies of the future",

and for what has already been announced by the Government in lifting the de facto ban on onshore wind developments, an issue on which cognoscenti of debates on it in this House will know I have been campaigning for many years. I give congratulations on reviving the solar power task force and the much needed co-ordinating mechanism to ensure the achievement of the Government's 2030 target for clean electricity. Equally, I welcome the legislative proposal to establish Great British Energy and

"to help the country achieve energy independence and unlock investment in energy infrastructure".

There will be plenty to get our collective teeth into in the forthcoming Session of Parliament, so I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, who I congratulate on his speech, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, to the formidable workload outlined. We have worked constructively together in the past. I look forward to continuing to do so and of course, if necessary, keeping their feet to the non-fossil fuel fire. I also want very sincerely to welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Swinburne, and the noble Lord, Lord Roborough—who we recognise, from his speech, has tremendous and wide-ranging lived experience in these issues—to their position on the Front Bench, and to express my hope to work constructively with them as well.

It is almost exactly five years since the UK became the first G7 nation to legislate legally binding targets on net zero under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, Theresa May. The impressive progress that this country has made, of which I think we are all proud, would not have been possible without a broad and deep consensus in Parliament, and way beyond it, on the importance of tackling climate change. That consensus has, in the words of the Climate Change Committee's report published today, "begun to fray", but there is an opportunity for it to be rebuilt. Of course there will be differences of approach and debate about mechanisms, costs and timescales, but consensus on the seriousness of the issue and the urgency of taking effective action are prerequisites to creating opportunities for growth, for jobs, for cleaner air and rivers, and for global leadership on this most global of issues.

We cannot pretend, as some do, that the UK's performance on climate change does not matter because it accounts for only a small percentage of global emissions. Half of all global emissions come from countries like us, responsible for less than 3% of the global total. If all those countries took that attitude then, frankly, the world would not make any progress on this issue. Without a sense of urgency at home, we cannot credibly lead from the front in combating international climate change as countries prepare to submit updated plans ahead of COP 30 next year.

We know that we must transition away from fossil fuels and need a clear and transparent plan for that transition which recognises the need to support affected workers and for them to be equipped for the new jobs of the green economy. I hope that the Government will pick up on our discussions from the end of the previous Parliament on continued exploration of taking fuel from the North Sea, and end the wasteful and polluting practice of venting and flaring. I also urge the Government to publish a land use strategy sooner rather than later to underpin the contested decisions that will inevitably need to be made in this area.

As well as building that cross-party approach, the other necessity to our work is urgency. The science is warning us that we are running out of road to make the changes needed to avoid climate tipping points. This Parliament needs to be the Parliament of climate delivery. Globally, we have seen records broken for extreme weather events. The eight warmest years on record have occurred since 2014 and we have just experienced the wettest 18 months ever recorded in

England. But recently UK policy has stalled in critical areas, from improving the energy efficiency of people's homes to readying our national grid for electrification, and to restoring nature and cleaning up our waterways.

Restructuring our economy to tackle climate change will not be straightforward and it will mean balancing off multiple factors. The challenge will be to make sure that, on each of these issues, we have the strategic focus but also the careful analysis to make informed decisions about how best to manage the risks and seize the net-zero opportunities before us. I suspect that the phrase already being used—trade-offs—will be a recurrent motif of debates in this Parliament.

It is really important that, five years out from the scientific and symbolic climate milestone of 2030, we make sure that the next stage of transition will be more visible to people and communities. This will therefore demand a new approach to secure public consent on how we implement it, but if people understand the detail and are engaged in discussion on the trade-offs and the benefits that change can bring locally and nationally, we will be much more likely to win hearts and minds. With renewed leadership and science-led decision-making, we can deliver on the issues that are vital today and will be critical to the legacy we leave for the future.

12.19 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I declare my interest as president of the Rural Coalition and add my congratulations to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on her new role.

As a long-term advocate for rural areas and the people who live and work in them, I know that our farmers and rural communities are uniquely placed to deliver the Government's missions of clean energy, increased building and the need to protect and restore our environment. Rural communities and rural businesses play an absolutely crucial role in the economic and social fabric of our country.

I welcome His Majesty's Government's plans to introduce measures to tackle pollution in our rivers, lakes and waterways. In my diocese of St Albans, covering Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, we are home to several of this country's beautiful chalk streams, which, despite being extraordinarily rare and precious habitats, have been utterly devastated by both extraction and pollution. For example, the River Ver in Hertfordshire has been found to have six times higher levels of *E. coli* than is acceptable in bathing water. Between March and June this year, sewage was discharged directly into the River Ver for more than 2,400 hours.

I appreciate that agricultural run-off is also a problem when it comes to ensuring that our rivers are kept clean and healthy. That is why it is vital that the Government work closely with Britain's farmers, as well as investing in research and development for better fertilisers and solutions to reduce the volume of manure and slurry. There have, in fact, been planning applications for slurry storage or energy-efficient greenhouses turned down as a result of environmental considerations—an outcome that is not only frustrating but counterproductive to what we are trying to achieve. Local authorities need to have access to the appropriate

expertise when making decisions on these applications. The planning practice guidance needs to be much clearer, with more flexibility built in so that farm businesses are able to build the infrastructure they need to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

I welcome warmly this Government's recognition of the fact that food security is part of national security. I was pleased to see the pledge to source a minimum of 50% of government-procured food from British producers. It is encouraging to see that the security of British farming is high up on the agenda both for the public and the Government. This is why I echo the National Farmers' Union's call for an increased, multi-year agricultural budget to secure the future of Britain's farming industry and to ensure that farmers and government can work together to move forward towards sustainable food production, environment targets and net zero. We need to work in collaboration with, not in opposition to, our vitally important farming sector.

Several noble colleagues on these Benches raised concerns during the passage of the recent Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act that the import of animals and animal product raised under welfare standards that would be illegal here are damaging British agricultural business. Battery-cage eggs and poultry production is banned here, yet our producers have been undercut by imported eggs and poultry reared to lower standards. I look forward to hearing more detail on His Majesty's Government's plans to ensure that our own producers are provided with a level playing field and to ensure that these safeguards are a central bedrock of any trade deals.

Finally, I would like to make a few comments on housing. We are all aware that this is a huge challenge; if there were lots of quick wins, the previous Government would have grabbed them straightaway. I am grateful for the approach being taken by Homes for All, the coalition trying to take a strategic and systemic approach to increasing housebuilding. My particular interest, over many years, is rural housing and the rural housing crisis. It is a problem that is different from the challenge of building in many urban centres. It is crucial the Government recognise the specificity of the housing crisis in rural areas and the way that this impacts rural communities differently, not least in ensuring long-term rural sustainability. We had hoped our previous Government would provide us with a long-term strategy; I hope that this Government will consider doing so.

Over many years, we have seen the closure of rural shops, schools and services from rural areas, partly linked to the lack of genuinely affordable housing. We have also seen the drain of young people and families—indeed, sometimes the elderly—as they are being forced to leave homes and communities, often where they have deep roots and have lived all their lives. Local communities need to be informing decisions around building new houses to ensure that they fit into the locality, as well as being well-designed and of good quality; ultimately, they need to strengthen the community. I call on His Majesty's Government to consider, as part of their reforms to planning, introducing a planning passport for rural exemption sites which have been highlighted as an avenue of great potential for mitigating the housing crisis. Future policies need to be sensitive to rural housing. That is not just the responsibility of

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]

Defra; it must happen across all government departments. It is why we need proper rural-proofing applied systematically to all legislation that comes to your Lordships' House.

With the right support and investment, the rural economy can add billions to the national economy, contributing towards this Government's mission to kick-start economic growth, as well as holding the potential to play a vital part in making Britain a clean energy superpower. I look forward to working with the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, in the coming years on these issues and others for the common good of our nation.

12.26 pm

Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke (Lab): My Lords, I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Hunt on the Front Bench; he has a distinguished career behind him and I think he has an even more distinguished career before him. I also pay tribute to my noble friend Lady Hayman of Ullock, who will probably be pestered by me for quite some time. I declare two interests: I am the honorary president of the Carbon Capture and Storage Association and I am also the honorary president of Energy Action Scotland, which is Scotland's pre-eminent fuel poverty charity.

I was not going to say anything about housing, but I would like to put one point into everyone's minds. In a cold country like Scotland—and it is a cold and wet country—how houses are built and made available to people is of great importance in dealing with fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is a terrible thing; I have seen it when I was a Member of Parliament, and I would not wish it on anyone.

I was absolutely delighted to see Great British Energy in the King's Speech yesterday. It took me back to when I was a young economist for the Scottish Trades Union Congress at the time when oil and gas was discovered in the North Sea. Organisations such as BNOG, which became Britoil, settled in Scotland. Not only did we have the engineers, but we also had the people building and those who were dealing with the economic consequences of such a vast industry. That still contributes enormously to the Scottish economy, so it is fantastic that there will be Great British Energy in Scotland as a public energy company.

Great British Energy needs to look at the whole system, including CO₂ and hydrogen infrastructure, which is required for the decarbonisation of industry. I suspect that very few people in the Chamber will be aware that the UK has almost one-third of Europe's geological storage capability. The potential of all of that is even greater for Britain than it is for all of the EU. There is huge potential in terms of jobs. Something like 70,000 jobs could be created in the energy sector, and, of course, there are great opportunities for taxation. There is an estimated £30 billion of tax revenues once we get to 2030 and on to 2050 and beyond. There is a great opportunity for us to move ahead. Carbon capture, utilisation and storage is an essential solution for reaching net-zero emissions. It plays a vital role in reducing emissions from industries such as steel, cement, chemicals and refining.

There is a vision for CCUS. One of the things that really buoyed me up in the run-up to the general election—like most people, I am always nervous of general elections being committed to one party—was that every time Rachel Reeves, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, made a major speech, she mentioned carbon capture and storage, so we know that in the heart of the Treasury there is an understanding of what can be created. Last night, the Secretary of State for Scotland raised with me the issue of carbon capture and storage, and I felt like dancing out of Dover House for the first time in a very long time, knowing there is that level of support across government.

There are some areas where we need the Government to act. There is the priority of low-carbon energy. We welcome the national wealth fund, because it can be used to secure private investment in industrial decarbonisation technologies, which is very important indeed. The Labour manifesto pledged £1 billion of the fund to support carbon capture, utilisation and storage.

We find ourselves in a situation where, as I mentioned, £30 billion of private investment is waiting to be deployed into CCUS, which could provide great revenue to the UK, but the Government have a window of opportunity to secure the first final investment decisions on track 1 CCUS clusters in the north-west and north-east of England by September this year. That CO₂ infrastructure will deliver industrial decarbonisation, clean hydrogen and flexible low-carbon power. This is such an exciting opportunity to start construction this year on the world's first large-scale integrated CCUS clusters, and I urge my colleagues on the Front Bench not to forget how great these opportunities are.

The track 1 expansion could be followed by track 2, which is needed to maintain the investment pipeline. The Secretary of State for Scotland mentioned track 2 to me last night. Unless we see progress towards CO₂ infrastructure throughout the regions, and in Scotland in particular, large employers such as our refineries will face an uncertain future and could find themselves in real difficulty participating in the low-carbon fuels market that will emerge around the world. Clarity is urgently needed for the expansion of the first two clusters and the development of track 2 clusters, not just in Scotland but in south Humber. This will enable developers to continue with their planned investment, securing jobs and economic growth where it is most needed. Can my colleagues on the Front Bench give some indication of when we will hear more about what will happen on track 2 clusters?

I am grateful for this opportunity to talk about carbon capture and storage; I came to it as Energy Minister. We do not fully appreciate the extent to which there are opportunities out there that have been untouched until now. We have an oil and gas industry in Scotland and in the north of England that provides great opportunities for jobs, not just here but around the world. Let us add to our investment by getting carbon capture, utilisation and storage up and running.

12.34 pm

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, I begin by congratulating, from the Opposition Back Benches, noble Lords opposite on their election victory. I wish

them well in the challenges that lie ahead. In particular, I welcome the Ministers here today and congratulate them on their appointments. As someone who was recalled to the colours way past my retirement age on many occasions, I am delighted to see the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, back on the Front Bench, particularly with the noble Baronesses, Lady Hayman and Lady Taylor, whose speeches in the last Parliament I will reread for any unguarded commitments.

Further to the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on your Lordships' House, I note in passing that the last time we had a King's Speech with a Labour Government, your Lordships' House had 863 Members, including 99 Viscounts, 175 Earls, 39 Marquesses, 26 Dukes and four Peers of royal blood. However, that is a matter for our debate on Tuesday, and I want to focus on the humbler end of our constitution: local government and housing.

Labour's election manifesto states:

"Labour will not increase taxes on working people".

What does that mean for next year's council tax? As the name clearly implies, it is a tax, and it is clearly paid by working people. Keeping that commitment can be done only by a generous increase in the revenue support grant in December. But the Institute for Fiscal Studies tells us that, far from having more resources at their disposal, unprotected departments such as DLUHC face a real-terms reduction of between 1.2% and 2.9% over the next few years. Reserves of local authorities are low; eight have gone bankrupt, many other well-run local authorities are in some difficulty, and there is relentless pressure from adult social services and children with special needs, whose fortunes the Government rightly want to improve.

I would like to be a fly on the wall when Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State at DLUHC, meets Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for a bilateral on the RSG. Irresistible force meets immovable object. The fiscal rules are not negotiable; Liz Truss discovered what happens when you spook the markets by overborrowing.

I believe that that commitment on tax will be broken. That should concern noble Lords opposite, not just because of a broken promise but because, while income tax, national insurance and VAT are progressive taxes—VAT is not levied on essentials—council tax is regressive, taking a higher proportion of the income of the less well off than of the more well off. The council tax on Buckingham Palace is less than that on the average three-bed semi in Blackpool and, perversely, Labour has ruled out rebanding. When she winds up, perhaps the Minister will explain how the dilemma I have just outlined might be resolved.

On a happier note, I welcome the commitment to restore housing targets for local authorities. That was my party's policy until an inexcusable aberration some 18 months ago. I recall saying many times that you cannot rely on the generosity of local councils to provide the homes the country needs. This is a welcome return to an essential component of a national housing strategy.

That commitment was confirmed by the Chancellor last week, but was I alone in finding it strange that a keynote speech on housing, planning and onshore wind was given by the Chancellor and not the Deputy

Prime Minister, who is Secretary of State at DLUHC, in charge of housing and planning? I ask myself: is there some "Succession"-like power struggle going on between the two most powerful women in the Government for control of the Labour dynasty?

I also welcome the decision mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, to recruit an additional 300 planning officers. There is a shortage, impeding the prompt processing of planning applications and the preparation of local plans, but this is a short-term fix. There were proposals in the last Parliament to allow local authorities to increase planning fees to cover their costs instead of the fees being determined centrally by Whitehall. Will the Government consider that, as part of their policy of returning autonomy to local government?

I also welcome the re-introduction of a renters reform Bill. Crucially, however, that Bill should be accompanied by measures to increase the supply of rented accommodation. In Europe, long-term institutional finance provides well-managed rented accommodation with security of tenure; here, it provides only 2%. We need to progressively reduce our overdependence on the private landlord—who is withdrawing from the market, pushing up rents—and get the pension funds and insurance industry to invest in long-term good-quality accommodation for rent. Historically, that would have done better than equities. Will Ministers get those institutions in the room with the Treasury and unlock those barriers to growth?

The manifesto promises to

"prioritise the building of new social rented homes".

I welcome that but, given how the business model works, if you prioritise the building of new social rented homes over homes at affordable rents, you get fewer houses because the social rented homes require a bigger grant. That will make the Government's target of 1.5 million homes harder to achieve. This is an even more ambitious target than the previous Government's one of 300,000 homes a year, which we never got anywhere close to reaching. Given that the UK housebuilding workforce has shrunk post Brexit and that new investment in skills and capacity is needed, how confident are Ministers that they have not overreached themselves with that target? If the Prime Minister is really in favour of the builders and not the blockers, perhaps he should revisit the nutrient neutrality rules, which are blocking 100,000 homes.

Finally, there is unfinished business on building safety and leasehold reform. On leasehold, who can forget the impassioned contributions of the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, in the last Parliament on abolishing this feudal system? His most recent one was less than two months ago, on 24 May:

"I certainly hope that, whoever is in power, the necessary action is taken and the leaseholder problems are dealt with".—[*Official Report*, 24/5/24; col. 1317.]

His hopes were met with a draft Bill, which I welcome. However, a particular problem faces leaseholders in blocks with safety issues post Grenfell. This cannot wait, and it is an issue on which I and others campaigned in the last Parliament. Of the 4,329 buildings identified with unsafe cladding, over half had not started remediation at the end of March this year, seven years after Grenfell. Only 23%—976 buildings—have completed remediation work. The manifesto says:

[LORD YOUNG OF COOKHAM]

"Labour will also take decisive action to improve building safety".

Can the Minister outline what decisive action Labour will take to help the many thousands of leaseholders who are in difficulties, living in unsafe buildings and facing bankruptcy and repossession, as well as those living in blocks under 11 metres, who get no help from the Building Safety Act? The noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, understands the problem, and I hope she can make progress.

There is much to be done, and I wish the Government well. I shall provide the same critical support to this Government as I did to the last one.

12.42 pm

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, it is always a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, who raised important questions on taxation, which I will come back to in a moment. I congratulate Ministers on their appointments and wish them well in their roles. We look forward to working with them constructively in the months and years ahead. I look forward very much to hearing the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Fuller. Since I will address one or two local government issues, I remind the House that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

I wish the Government a fair wind. The public are crying out for stable and responsible government with a clear sense of direction. We need an end to the boosterism of recent Governments, an end to poorly drafted Bills, and an end to Governments announcing policies that cannot be delivered. The electorate expect this new Government to pursue a reform agenda, and they are clearly doing that. I am pleased that their intentions were demonstrated by early announcements, such as the decision on onshore wind turbines, and by the gracious Speech yesterday. Public expectations are high, so the Government's pace is most welcome.

We will all have our lists of priorities for the Government to undertake to make a difference in this first Session of the Parliament. For me, the drive to clean up our rivers and watercourses and the need for adequate water supplies to support growth are paramount. I want the Government to address child poverty. They should urgently abolish the two-child limit. It would cost just £1.7 billion and make a huge difference to those children and their families, and to their health and well-being.

I want the Government to find a solution to bed-blocking and the crisis in social care. I think there is to be a royal commission to fix social care, but it was not announced in the King's Speech yesterday. It would be helpful to know what is planned for that, because bed-blocking is causing serious problems for both the National Health Service and local government finances.

The noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, talked about regressive taxation. For me, it is a priority to end this. During the election, Labour talked a lot about not raising taxes, but it meant only income tax, national insurance and VAT. What about the social care precept and council tax? They are regressive taxes, and I hope the Government will agree to stop adding to the social care precept. As a regressive tax, it impacts most on people who are already poor.

I welcome greater investment in the UK by our pension funds—I hope that will happen—as well as plans generally to enhance private investment in our infrastructure. I welcome the plans to build more homes, but please can these be genuinely affordable for people on average incomes? I wish the Government would cease the use of the term "affordable" when they are nothing of the sort for many aspiring to secure their own homes. Rent levels should not exceed a third of household income. In London, for example, it is often over 50%. I particularly welcome plans to introduce the leasehold and commonhold reform Bill and the renters reform Bill, both of which are urgently needed.

On the planning and infrastructure Bill, I say that the need for more housing is clearly extremely important. I am pleased to see the aim of increasing community gain from planning permissions. It is also good to see the commitment to building more homes, particularly homes for social rent, without which the crisis of homelessness cannot be addressed. The number of homes for social rent fell by 260,000 over the last 10 years, through demolitions, the right to buy and the re-designation of homes from social rent to affordable rent. Over the years, right to buy has been abused by private landlords who buy up social rented homes and place them in the private rented sector. I hope this problem will be addressed as part of this Bill, not least the level of the right-to-buy discount.

The major cause of the high cost of housing has been a lack of supply. Demand was encouraged through schemes such as Help to Buy but, in the end, while helping some new owners, this increased prices and boosted demand but left supply at too low a level. The Government now commit to building 1.5 million new homes over five years, at an average of 300,000 a year. But what about the 1.2 million existing planning permissions awaiting buildout? It is reported that, since 2015, 2.7 million homes have been granted planning permission but only 1.5 million have actually been built. I hope Ministers might clarify the numbers, either now or in writing. Are the Government talking about 1.5 million additional to the existing 1 to 1.2 million homes that have planning permission but have not been built? If it is both added together, that means that the Government plan to deliver some 2.7 million houses for people to live in. This would be most welcome, but I have not understood the numbers. Will the Government confirm that they will not count office conversions to small, single-person units as part of that? Will they penalise slow buildout once permission is secured?

Our failure to build enough homes is not just down to the planning system. Ministers need to consider incentives to increase the number of small local builders. They need to look at greater use state-owned land, which represents 6% of all freehold land in the UK. They are committed, I think—I would like to hear them repeat it—to building homes that are sustainable to low-carbon standards and to improving nature conservancy as they do that. That can be done. There are many examples of it being done, but I hope the Government are committed to doing it.

Mention has been made of 300 more planning officers. It is actually a very low number. I hope that the idea of the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, of increasing planning fees to help pay for it will be taken on board.

The Government need too to look carefully at how they deliver improvements in infrastructure such as transport, health facilities and schools earlier than currently, when they often follow the building as opposed to being built alongside it.

I think there will be a big row about the setting of targets—the “how, not if”, as the Government have said. Whose responsibility will it be to agree those targets? Is it Whitehall? Is it the mayoral combined authorities? Is it the local planning authority? I am in favour of targets—they help to deliver the outcomes we want and to give a common understanding of need and ambition—but I hope the Government can clarify who is in charge of the “how” rather than the “if”.

12.52 pm

Lord Lilley (Con): My Lords, I welcome the new Ministers to their posts. I wish them well and sincerely hope that they will succeed in their mission to promote economic growth.

The great advantage of speaking in this Chamber is that we can speak perfectly frankly in the certain knowledge that nothing we say here will ever leak out to the world outside, so I want to take advantage of the privacy of this Chamber to offer some advice to Ministers opposite and to tell them some possibly inconvenient truths that we, or I, certainly would not be allowed to voice on the BBC and which they may not even hear from their officials. That is not to impugn the integrity of officials. My officials over 10 years in government were wonderful. Only twice in 10 years did two very virtuous officials succumb to the “noble lie” temptation of concealing information from me or distorting it because they thought that if I knew the truth I might misbehave. I hope it will be rare in the Minister’s department for that sort of thing to happen, but unfortunately virtuous enthusiasm and groupthink go together, so he may find that it is a bit more prevalent than it was in my days.

I met recently an official from my old department who said that they were initially very disconcerted when I took over, because when they gave me some facts or arguments that they were convinced would be absolutely in line with my prejudices, my instant response was, “But is it true?” I urge Ministers to take the same attitude, not least in this area.

The Government promise that tackling climate change and accelerating the move to net zero will lower energy bills and generate economic growth, but is it true? There is no doubt that cheap energy is a prerequisite for growth. America has proved, relative to Europe, that because it has cheap energy it is growing far faster. Equally, we know that expensive energy kills growth. I became an energy analyst in the early 1970s. In 1974, the quadrupling of oil prices killed growth—the end of *Les Trente Glorieuses*, as the French say. The 30 years of rapid growth after the war was signalled by that and we had much slower growth thereafter. We tend to forget that, in 2009, the great financial crisis was triggered by a rise in oil prices, and growth worldwide has been slower since then.

I therefore support the production of energy from whatever sources are cheapest for this country—I welcome the removal of barriers on offshore wind, for example—but I am sceptical, to say the least, as to whether the

Government’s commitment to double onshore, triple solar and quadruple offshore will give cheaper energy. My scepticism has nothing to do with global warming. I studied physics at Cambridge and did the online course on climate change at Chicago University, so I know that the science of global warming is rock solid. My concern is about the costs and economics of the ways we are trying to tackle it.

I was just as sceptical about the claims that achieving net zero would give us cheaper energy and faster growth when they came from Boris Johnson as when they come in the Labour manifesto—indeed, I never expected to find Boris being comparatively a paragon of honesty and understatement until I read the Labour manifesto.

There is a respectable case for saying that we must incur higher costs and forgo cheap energy to prevent the impact of climate change on future generations, but it is surely unlikely that this will be costless, let alone miraculously provide a cornucopia of cheap energy and rapid growth. I therefore urge Ministers to ask their officials why, if it is cheaper, renewable energy needs subsidies. I urge them to ask why, if renewable energy is cheaper, UK electricity prices have risen in 22 of the 27 years since we started the transition to renewables.

If officials say that new offshore fields will provide electricity at below £50 per megawatt hour, Ministers should ask them why the recent contracts for difference, in March this year, offered more than £100 per megawatt hour for offshore wind fields and £89 per megawatt hour for onshore fields. They should ask too why they claim that gas is more expensive than offshore wind. They have set offshore wind at more than £100 per megawatt hour, yet the DESNZ energy generation costs document of last year shows that the cost of a new gas-fuelled plant, excluding tax, is only £60 per megawatt hour.

How come wind is supposedly cheaper when it is more expensive? They will say, “Oh, it’s because if you include in the cost of gas the social cost of carbon, that raises it”. And so it does; that is a perfectly reasonable argument. But it is generally accepted that the social cost of carbon is about £50 per tonne—that is about £10 per megawatt hour—so gas is still cheaper if we include that. But then the officials will come back and say, “Oh, well, we don’t use the social cost of carbon. We impose a tax called the appraisal tax”. That is the tax necessary to make gas uneconomic, so it is a self-referential conclusion. Ministers should therefore ask them some hard questions about that sort of thing.

Ministers should also ask why officials always quote costs as levelised costs of energy and do not take the advice of Dieter Helm, the leading energy economist in this country who was asked by the previous Government to do a review, and compare firm costs: the cost of providing energy, including some of the cost of providing back-up power—in the case of wind and solar when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. Why not include some of that cost? It is the obvious and logical thing to do.

If the back-up is gas, we have to include not only a share of that back-up cost but the carbon capture and storage that will be necessary to extract the CO₂ from the gas in the back-up. Incidentally, I welcome the fact

[LORD LILLEY]

that this Government are proposing to maintain a fleet of gas plants and accept that gas and oil will be needed well into the future. They might also ask officials why they rely on figures from think tanks—and, indeed, their own officials—rather than on the costs of fields, which are produced and published in companies' documents that are certified by accountants, who would go to jail if they were lying. Those figures show that there is no significant decline in the cost of offshore oil; it remains high, and higher than that of gas.

The second item in the Government's rosy outlook is that green investment will generate growth. For the sake of argument, let us put aside the impact on growth of higher energy costs. How will the move to green investments produce growth? The noble Lord, Lord Vallance, formerly an impartial adviser and now a Labour Minister, claims in the Labour manifesto that growth will come from selling technology abroad. He says that we can treat this

"like the vaccine challenge ... exporting our solutions worldwide".

However, he says that that will work only if we do it rapidly because

"if we choose to go slowly, others will provide the answers, and ultimately we'll end up buying these solutions rather than selling them".

But what are we going to sell to the rest of the world as a result of this great revolution? It is not going to be generators, wind vanes or towers, and it is not going to be batteries. Unless the Government can tell us what it is, we had better invest in things where we have a comparative advantage, rather than one where the rest of the world is overinvesting already.

1.02 pm

The Duke of Wellington (CB): My Lords, I start by congratulating the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on his first public statement. He said that we have

"record levels of sewage in ... our rivers".

We all know that, but it is very good that the Secretary of State made it his first statement. He then went on to state that the department's first of five core priorities would be to clean up British lakes, rivers and seas. That is clearly a policy that the public has wanted to hear for some time, and I very much commend the new Government for that. I also welcome further announcements by the Secretary of State last Friday; in particular, that in future increased charges to customers may not be diverted to bonuses, dividends or salary increases.

In the King's Speech yesterday there was reference to a Bill to improve water quality and to strengthen powers of the water regulator—of course I welcome that. It is worth looking for a moment at the history of why we are in this terrible situation. The water companies were privatised in 1989. Mrs Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, would have preferred to create a competitive market, but she had to accept that water companies are natural monopolies and must therefore be efficiently regulated. With hindsight, the Government of the day made a mistake in splitting the regulatory responsibility between the Water Services Regulation Authority, Ofwat, and the then National Rivers Authority, which subsequently became the Environment Agency. We must

accept with hindsight that that regulatory structure was flawed. Ofwat is programmed to try to keep customers' bills as low as possible, but without sufficient regard to the unending need to invest in and modernise the infrastructure of water distribution and waste management treatment. Ofwat has allowed many of the water companies to become overindebted, and several are now owned by private equity groups that do not have an environmental objective.

Interestingly, Mrs Thatcher apparently believed that privatising the water companies would be beneficial to the environment. That was before the days of highly leveraged capital structures devised by private equity groups. I must quickly accept, though, that privatisation, including eventual ownership by private equity groups, has brought large amounts of capital investment, which we must recognise would not have been available under state ownership.

The other regulator is the Environment Agency, which in my opinion failed until quite recently to attach sufficient priority to monitoring the effluent from sewerage works and the discharges of storm overflows. In fact, during the passage of the Environment Bill through this House, in 2021, it became obvious that Defra officials and the Environment Agency thought that those of us—and there are several today in this House—who tried to draw attention to the dreadful levels of sewage discharges were exaggerating the seriousness of the situation. Since then, Ministers and the regulators have tried to reduce discharges but, in 2023, there were more discharges than ever before. So it is absolutely right that a new set of Ministers should apply themselves to the problem.

I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on her appointment as a Minister in the department. I cannot imagine anyone more qualified to take on this role, and I hope that she will be able to transmit to officials and the regulators her undoubted determination to have an impact on this appalling situation.

The Prime Minister's Office published yesterday a background briefing on the new proposed water (special measures) Bill, and I welcome a number of the features in the proposed Bill. Directors of water companies will face personal criminal liability for breaking the law. The water regulator—I assume Ofwat—will have the power to ban bonuses. There will be a new code of conduct for executives of water companies, and a new power to bring automatic and severe fines, although it is not clear whether that power will be given to both Ofwat and the Environment Agency. There will be a requirement for water companies to install real-time monitors at every sewage outlet, and the data will be scrutinised by the water regulators—I assume both Ofwat and the Environment Agency.

The briefing goes on to say:

"The Government will outline further legislation to fundamentally transform our water industry"

and reset it. I therefore suggest to the Minister and Secretary of State that they should set up an independent review of the way in which the water companies are regulated. I realise that that would have an effect only in the medium term, but clearly the Government want to change the water industry. The current regulatory

procedures have clearly not worked in these past 35 years. We cannot know whether a different structure or a single regulator might have done better, but it certainly could not have done worse.

The advantage of a review is that it would enable a small group of independent individuals to step back from the operations of government, the regulators and the water companies to assess the best way to regulate private finance in the water industry while rectifying the appalling damage to human health and the aquatic environment currently being wrought by the privately owned water companies. Both regulators have historically let us down. Both are now trying to catch up with the public mood and with revised legislation. But it is at least worth reviewing the structure to consider whether an alternative might not achieve in the medium term what the new Government clearly want from the water industry.

I hope that the Minister will take seriously my suggestion and discuss it with her ministerial colleagues. In the meantime, I wish the Minister well in her new post.

1.10 pm

Lord Lansley (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington. I remember his amendments to legislation that were supported by this House and made important contributions to our thinking about how to have cleaner rivers. From my point of view, in Cambridgeshire, it is also very important that we use water well. The measures that we are piloting in Cambridgeshire for reducing the usage of water to below 110 litres per person—potentially even further down—and using the water credit system to support that will, I hope, enable the water industry to work more effectively in future.

For the purposes of this speech, I should declare an interest as chair of the Cambridgeshire Development Forum. I join with noble Lords, and indeed the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, in welcoming Ministers to their new responsibilities. I have been here and listened to many of the speeches that they have made on the subjects for which they will now be responsible, and I know that we look forward very much to their being able to deliver on some of those objectives.

One that I want to focus on particularly is the question of planning and housing. My noble friend Lord Young of Cookham and I tabled an amendment to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill on the reintroduction of mandatory national housing targets. I was rather pleased yesterday that the Leader of the House said that Ministers would, she hoped, remember the importance of this place in bringing forward considered and constructive amendments. That was one such amendment; as it happened, it had the support of the Labour Party and, indeed, a number of Cross-Benchers. I must remind the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, that the Liberal Democrats abstained, so it did not secure the overall support of the House. When we now move forward with mandatory housing targets, I hope that we can try to work in some of the beneficial effects that we anticipated at that time.

I want to talk particularly about the planning and housing structure. In this speech I will dive deeply, rather than range widely, because I think that what we need to do on planning and housing is urgent. Of course,

there is in the gracious Speech a planning and infrastructure Bill. There are some important measures in that, particularly in relation to land assembly, compulsory purchase powers and the value attached on compulsory purchase for land assembly. But much needs to be done that does not need to wait for legislation. As Ministers will recall, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act, as it is now, has powers for Ministers. The most important question is about how they will now be used.

We want to see, as rapidly as possible, the revised National Planning Policy Framework. We want to see the mandatory housing targets. We want to see, I might say, a revision of the standard method, because the current standard method is not fit for purpose. I add, in parentheses, that clearly it must reflect demographic changes and potential demographic changes. It should reflect affordability and the relative price of housing, since that is a straightforward measure of the pressure on the housing market in that area. It should also look very carefully at employment change and future employment needs—and do so not in individual local planning authorities but collectively across functional economic areas and travel-to-work areas. The local planning authorities in a travel-to-work area should, collectively, be required to meet the housing requirements associated with the employment changes in that area and, for that matter, should work together on employment space as well.

We will be looking forward—I hope that Ministers have this very quickly in hand—to the publication of national development management policies. The legislation permits this, and I think that Ministers would be well advised to pick it up. I know that there was some scepticism among Ministers during the passage of the Bill, but it affords the possibility for local plans to be produced more quickly and with significant reduction in the consultation requirements for much of the decision-making processes. A clear example of where Ministers can use it is in relation to the green belt. Ministers will recall that, in Cambridgeshire in 2006, we reviewed the green belt and took land out of it. If we had not done so then, we would not now have the growing Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Cambridge would not be the scientific superpower that it presently is. We know that we will have to do it again.

In addition to enabling decisions on the structure of the green belt, and indeed on individual sites within the green belt, to be more flexibly considered, it is important that Ministers restate some of the objectives. For example, in Cambridge we were always clear that we would not prejudice an historic city in a countryside setting, that there would be green fingers and green space within Cambridge itself and that we would not allow the coalescence of surrounding villages into Cambridge to create a much larger urban area. All those things are continuing, valid proscriptions and will rightly be applied, I guess, in other places. We have shown that much can be done in the green belt by way of positive development if one looks at it in a locally led and constructive way.

On things that should be done straightaway using the available powers, I mention the revision and reintroduction of an infrastructure levy. Again, there was some scepticism during the passage of the Bill, but the powers are there for every local authority

[LORD LANSLEY]

collectively to produce infrastructure delivery frameworks. The combined authorities, or whatever subregional structures are put in place, should all have infrastructure delivery strategies and affordable housing strategies, and should all be required to have infrastructure levies that are predictable—based on pounds per square foot rather than net development gain—so that developers and promoters are absolutely clear that the land that they option or buy will have substantial infrastructure and affordable housing requirements that must be met and that, therefore, the value of the land that they acquire is properly discounted to take account of that.

I come back to Cambridgeshire for my last minute. I am looking forward to the maiden speech of my noble friend Lord Fuller, a fellow East Anglian. He might acknowledge that the Cambridge effect is an East Anglian phenomenon. We want to support it. In my last minute, I just want to say to Ministers on the Front Bench that, just before the election was announced, we had a very useful and important seminar at St John's College, Cambridge, where we brought together local leaders, the Cambridge Delivery Group and Peter Freeman as chair of Homes England and of the Cambridge Delivery Group. It demonstrated that the Cambridge 2050 initiative is not the "Gove plan" but a shared ambition that can be delivered by the Cambridgeshire region. We may be only 1% of this country, but we are much more than 1% in terms of our future economic ambition and potential for growth. I hope that Ministers will, as I suspect that the speech by the new Chancellor of the Exchequer highlighted, support the Cambridge 2050 initiative and work with the conclusions from that seminar, which have been communicated by us to Ministers. I look forward to those constructive discussions.

1.20 pm

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on her appointment. I am so glad that we have a new Government full of energy and with a series of ambitious Bills and policies, many of which I look forward to supporting. Domestically in the UK, it is a time of optimism. Globally, it is a fearful time. Of course, it is good news that the Government have prioritised climate change, practical solutions and climate change negotiations, and that Ed Miliband will lead the UK delegation to the COP talks. I think that this Government, unlike the last, get why top-level, consistent leadership is so important.

In mentioning climate change, I must also congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, who has led Peers for the Planet, providing us with so many briefings over the last several years. Her initiative really deserves wide recognition and I am very glad she was speaking today. I look forward to Bills that address what we can do in our own patch here in the UK, in cleaning up rivers and supporting regenerative agriculture that protects both food production and biodiversity, because swinging wildly from encouraging food production to just rewilding is not helpful. We need to strike a balance and give farmers certainty. We need to see that solar panels are the new normal on roofs, and there are many other practical steps that we can take.

Of course, our role as Liberal Democrats, with a much stronger voice in the Commons and a crucial voting mass here in the Lords, will be to play the constructive part of a good opposition. As the Government roll out their housing Bills, it is essential that housing and planning include a standard for associated green space for those new communities and for existing communities. The heritage lottery report *Space to Thrive* drew on a decade of research and 365 studies, and shows just how important public green space is for so many things, including for physical and mental health, something that was emphasised during the pandemic; for mitigating inequalities, so that people who do not have their own gardens can mix with those who do and it becomes a space that children can play in and improve their physical health; for connecting with nature; and indeed for supporting local economies.

As housing plans are developed, they absolutely must respect the need for green space. More housing does not have to negatively affect biodiversity either. As this country addresses the great need for housing, we can do it in a win-win way that enhances biodiversity. I have been much cheered by the emphasis on clean water today. Noble Lords may have seen the report from Singapore recently, where lots of otters actually thrive in the city. They returned to the city simply because the rivers were cleaned up. I look forward to having trouble crossing to Millbank because of the otters. We need to pass on a sense of wonder in nature to our children and grandchildren, encouraging school trips and family opportunities to experience wilder places, national parks, local woodlands, mountains and coasts, because what people cannot see is hard for them to value. That is why the Countryside and Rights of Way Act brought in by the Labour Government in 2000 was so important. We had the pleasure, in this House, of many Committee days spent making that Act practical and workable. I note that an update to the right to roam is no longer in the Government's programme. I regret that and I hope that they will remember the crucial importance of enabling more people to stay in touch with nature.

Perhaps if there is one other lesson from the Labour years of the 2000s, it is that when the going gets tough they must resist the temptation to get repressive. The 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act meant that you could not even stand on your own in Parliament Square in a T-shirt with a slogan on it. The repression was so laughably extreme that the comedian Mark Thomas made a show out of it, but it was serious.

Talking of repression, I hope that this Government will review the Conservatives' crushing Public Order Act. That has a bearing on the climate change issue, because young people want to express their fears about climate change, and the last nine years have seen a really Orwellian situation with the then Government saying that freedom of speech and the right to protest are important, then enacting laws that have made protest very difficult and have increasingly criminalised those who are bona fide protesters—not extremists but concerned citizens. In cleaning up our environment and addressing climate change, the Government should renew faith in democracy by coming down on the side of the concerned citizen. I look forward to working with this Government towards that future.

1.26 pm

Lord Etherton (CB): My Lords, the Government have declared their intention to introduce legislation to promote social housing and increase the rights of tenants and their protection. These are matters to which I fully subscribe. Although the Minister—the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath—did not elaborate in his opening address on what is intended in relation to tenants' rights and protections, I assume that housing in this debate includes those matters. I declare my interest in the form of my spouse's ownership of a very small portfolio of residential rental properties.

I wish to emphasise, as I did at Second Reading of the Renters (Reform) Bill introduced by the last Government, that a careful balance is needed in the private rented sector between increasing the rights and protections for tenants on the one hand, and imposing a regime which drives out of the market a significant number of PRS landlords on the other hand. Some 4.6 million households, or about 11 million people, rent from a private landlord, representing 19% of the entire housing market. This includes some 1.3 million households with children and nearly 400,000 households of people over 65 years of age. The crucial importance of the private rental sector is highlighted by the fact that there is a shortage of about 1 million homes.

In excess of one in five households in England, and one in four in London, rely on the private rental sector for accommodation. According to figures given by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2010, 89% of landlords in England were private individuals, and 98% of those owned fewer than 10 properties. In 2019, the successor housing department indicated that 45% of private landlords, representing 21% of tenancies, owned a single property, and a further 38% of landlords, representing 31% of tenancies, owned between two and four rental properties. Those facts show, first, that the private rental sector plays a crucial role in the provision of accommodation; secondly, that the overwhelming majority of landlords in the private rental sector are private individuals; and thirdly, that nearly 50% of them own a single property for let, and some 83% own four properties or fewer for rent.

This demonstrates the need for an extremely careful balance between, on the one hand, protecting tenants in the private rented sector from bad landlords and giving them appropriate redress in the case of landlords' defaults and, on the other hand, not imposing on the many small investor landlords standards and obligations that will drive them from the sector. It will be important to gather information and data that can throw some reliable light on whether the proposed legislative changes will have a significant impact in reducing available accommodation in the private rented sector. As far as I am aware, no reliable evidence was obtained by the last Government for the purposes of the Renters (Reform) Bill. At its Second Reading, I pointed to just a few matters that did not achieve the right balance.

So although there is an urgency to the Government's proposed policy, care must be taken to avoid unintended consequences. The difficulties in this area of achieving a good balance support the case for a drive to construct new affordable social housing, whether by local authorities, build-to-rent development companies or otherwise. To that end, I greatly support the imposition on local

authorities of targets for the construction of affordable housing. For the same reason, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, that there is a need to look again at the right of tenants of council homes and housing associations to purchase their homes, so depleting the stock of available affordable social housing for the many people who so greatly need it.

1.31 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, some of whose points I will echo.

I welcome this King's Speech as a vital first step towards delivering the new Government's mandate for change. It was a joy to see that tackling the housing crisis was at the core of the Prime Minister's speech. It was a joy yesterday to welcome my noble friend Lady Smith of Basildon to her richly deserved role as Leader of the House, and it is a joy today to welcome my noble friends Lady Hayman of Ullock, Lady Taylor of Stevenage, Lord Khan of Burnley and Lord Hunt of Kings Heath.

The Labour manifesto was clear about the scale of the challenge we face and the need to solve the housing crisis for good. In her first speech, the Chancellor outlined her vision for growth and national renewal, to which housing is absolutely central. I will focus my remarks on housing in the social and private rented sectors, on why social housing must play a decisive role in delivering our new Government's mandate for change and national renewal, and on the need for all tenants in the private rented sector to have the right to redress when they are given a raw deal by their landlords. I declare an interest as chair of the Property Ombudsman board.

We know that a decent, affordable home is the foundation of our health, happiness and prosperity. But for the last 14 years, despite some real efforts to build more homes, this simple fact has been lost on successive Governments, who have failed to match their promises with delivery. We cannot afford to continue this failed approach. There are now 8.5 million people in England with some form of unmet housing need and, without action, by the end of the next Parliament every school in England will have on average seven children who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. For many decades, we have had no clear long-term strategy for housing.

We just cannot go on like this. Not only is this morally unjustifiable, it is economically ruinous. The total cost to our society caused by poor housing is estimated at £18.5 billion per year. The private market has never delivered more than 200,000 homes a year. Planning reform can open up more sites over time, but the speculative housebuilder model and market demand mean that market homes will not be built out quickly enough to deliver 1.5 million homes this Parliament. Social housing is essential to hitting that target, and to economic growth. Research from the National Housing Federation, the CEBR and Shelter found that building 90,000 social rented homes would add £51.2 billion to the economy.

I urge our new Government to build on their very promising start by committing to a long-term 10-year plan for housing. By 2035, a long-term plan could fix

[BARONESS WARWICK OF UNDERCLIFFE]
child homelessness, halve overcrowding, provide the security of a social home for one million more people and ensure that every region has the homes it needs to grow.

The National Housing Federation has produced a social housing renewal plan that calls for a new long-term affordable homes programme to deliver the 90,000 new social homes we need every year. It will need minimum funding of £4.6 billion per year, on average, for the first Parliament—a real investment for the future. It calls for a new long-term social housing investment fund of £2 billion per year to help upgrade and decarbonise existing social homes, while unlocking capacity for new supply. It also calls for widening access to the building safety fund so that all social homes can be made safe for the residents living in them. The new Government have set out a welcome statement of intent on improving the current building safety settlement and ending this scandal for good.

I hope the Minister will commit today to providing long-awaited certainty and stability for social landlords. It would drive investment and build confidence. A 10-year rent settlement would give social landlords the certainty they need to plan investment over the long term and mean that rents are affordable for tenants and still lower, in real terms, than they were in 2015.

I turn to the private rented sector. Everyone agrees that, for both social and private tenants, the complaints, redress and ombudsman landscape is difficult to fathom. It has been a long-standing ambition of Governments and others to simplify this landscape and ensure that all tenants in England, regardless of tenure, have equal access to an ombudsman to resolve a dispute with their landlord or managing agent. I wholeheartedly support that ambition.

Social housing tenants in England already have access to the Government-appointed Housing Ombudsman service. There is a regulator in this sector, and most of the 17,000 housing providers are larger corporate entities, most owning many properties. While some entities are commercial, they are delivering housing with a social purpose on behalf of the Government. There is structure in this sector.

The private rented sector is very different. The sector is entirely commercial, with no overarching regulator, no overarching social purpose and a hugely diverse provider base. Data from HMRC shows that there are almost 2.4 million incorporated private landlords in England, with 43% owning just one property. This diversity of providers in the private sector is mirrored by the diversity of private sector tenants, all of whom have different needs. We know that there are vulnerable tenants in both sectors who will need help to understand where to go when things go wrong.

Tenants who rent via letting agents can already seek redress through one of two authorised redress schemes, of which the Property Ombudsman is one, but if the complaint is about the landlord, the redress schemes may not be able to resolve their problem. This is because these schemes are currently empowered to order agents, but not landlords, to provide redress to a tenant. Currently, although the Property Ombudsman helped more than 57,000 landlords and tenants last

year who were often simply seeking answers to questions from an authoritative and experienced source, it could not provide any redress. The Government's plan to create a new PRS ombudsman will fill this gap.

I am delighted to see this commitment and am hopeful that, in time, the other gaps in this complex sector will be closed and that everyone in the private property sector will be able to access an ombudsman regardless of their tenure. I hope the Government will ensure that the new ombudsman understands the sector and meets the needs of the diverse cohort of stakeholders so that tenants and landlords have confidence and trust in the new service.

In the meantime, I urge the Minister to ensure that, in planning for the new PRS ombudsman, there will be a transparent and open process in deciding who should operate such an ombudsman scheme, with Ministers avoiding making public declarations about who that should be beforehand.

The commitments made by our new Government on housing and redress are enormously welcome and show signs that we are beginning, finally, to change direction to tackle the housing crisis once and for all. For the first time in many years, there is a real sense of optimism and opportunity in the housing sector. In delivering on their proposals, the Government will go a long way in restoring public trust and confidence and in fulfilling the Prime Minister's promise of delivering security, opportunity, prosperity and justice for every person in this country.

1.39 pm

Baroness Moyo (Con): My Lords, I join the chorus welcoming the Ministers to their new responsibilities. I also very much look forward to hearing the maiden speech of my noble friend Lord Fuller. I know he will make a very great contribution to this House, given his experience in business and as a leader in local government.

We continue to be in an era mired in low economic growth, with GDP growth in the United Kingdom forecast this year to remain stubbornly below the 2% per year mark. According to the International Monetary Fund yesterday, the United Kingdom GDP forecasts are 0.7% for this year and 1.5% for 2025. As a reminder, an economy needs to grow by at least 3% per year to double per-capita incomes in one generation, which is approximately 25 years. That is the route to improve living standards for the next generation.

However, amid those sombre growth prospects, there is now the promise of two supercycles that could propel an era of stronger economic growth and drive opportunity here at home in Britain and globally: generative artificial intelligence and the clean energy transition. In the King's Speech, His Majesty stated a commitment to a clean energy transition that will lower energy bills for consumers over time. However, it is now becoming increasingly clear not only that these two paths—AI and the energy transition—are closely interdependent but that AI is creating a surge in global energy demand that could meaningfully undermine the clean energy transition, pose a challenge to national energy security, particularly in a deglobalising world, and in fact increase energy prices, creating inflationary pressure and raising the cost of living.

The International Energy Agency forecasts that by 2026—just two years from now—global energy use by AI data centres alone will consume 1,000 terawatt hours. For context, that is more than the total electricity and gas consumed in the United Kingdom in 2023. More specifically, the chief executive of Britain's National Grid cautioned this year that the grid is becoming constrained and that, here in the UK, power use by AI data centres will increase sixfold in the next decade.

Even before AI's possible impact on the global economy became apparent, global demand for energy was unmet. That demand-supply imbalance in energy has been explained by world population growth, urbanisation and increases in wealth, as developing economies have converged to higher living standards over several decades. The shortfall in energy supply globally means that, still today, roughly 1.5 billion people around the world have no access to clean, cost-effective and reliable energy. The dramatic increase in energy demand arising from new, transformative technologies—such as artificial intelligence, cryptocurrencies and quantum computing—has real-world implications for the economy, the financial markets and public policy.

For the economy, the AI-energy transition dynamics could lead to greater social inequality. AI hyperscalers—large technology companies that have significant computing infrastructure and resources to support artificial intelligence—have much more flexibility to move their data and storage centres to locations where they can tap into potentially cheaper, cleaner energies, such as generation IV nuclear plants. The question is whether such a trend could leave households relying evermore on conventional forms of energy, which can be more expensive to transmit and distribute. If so, that would entrench energy poverty for households and widen energy inequality, at least between technology businesses and household consumers. Another route to higher prices is that extra demand for energy puts inflationary pressures on renewables, forcing up the full complex of energy prices and thereby harming living standards.

For financial markets, without a meaningful increase in global energy supply, the rising energy demand from AI could add enormous volatility to energy prices. These dynamics are not yet fully priced into either the energy or capital markets. I point here to my register of interests, as I serve on the board of directors of a global energy company.

For public policy, how then does Britain and the wider world face the additional threat of the prospect of energy instability? The pressure of additional energy demand from AI means that Governments must update their understanding of global energy supply-demand dynamics, ensure that energy security is retained in a world of conflicts and geopolitical fissures, and remain steadfast in the clean energy transition. We heard in the King's Speech of the proposal of a new national champion—Great British Energy—a publicly owned clean-power company that will help the country achieve energy independence and unlock investment in energy infrastructure. The global energy demand-supply dynamics are leading many to think of energy primarily as a public utility, rather than as a commercial enterprise. There is a movement towards the creation of national champions and even discussion in some quarters—dare I say—of the outright nationalisation of energy assets.

Noble Lords will no doubt already be aware that 60% of world energy today is supplied by state-owned enterprises. Such an approach can jar with the market-based system of energy production in many developed and western countries; however, clearly the expense, size, scale and complexity of the clean energy transition means that some state involvement is warranted, at least through thoughtful regulation, subsidies and tax reform.

We must not sleepwalk into a situation where clean energy transition is delayed and even impeded because of uncalibrated new demand shocks. As we legislate, we should be minded that an all-important factor in determining a successful energy transition will be innovation. Therefore, it is crucial that any system and intervention protect, encourage and harness the innovation abilities in the private sector. Only with a vibrant private sector working in partnership with the public sector can we hope to deliver reliable, cost-effective and scalable energy at pace.

1.47 pm

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, I declare my interest as the Church of England's lead Bishop for housing. Along with other noble Lords, I very much look forward to the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Fuller.

It is undeniable that the UK is in the midst of a housing crisis—one with deep roots. Too often, housing has been viewed as a financial asset rather than a fundamental human need. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, for the comments and commitments in his opening speech, but the housing crisis has been escalating for decades, so we should not underestimate just how long it will take to fix. Therefore, I cannot overstate the need for long-term thinking in tackling the housing crisis, a point well made by the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick.

A clear, long-term vision and a carefully thought-through strategy to provide decent, affordable homes for all can deliver three major goals of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship. That is why, along with my right reverend friend the Bishop of St Albans, I am pleased to support Homes for All—a vision for a long-term housing strategy supported by churches, charities, think tanks and others, which I commend to all noble Lords.

Here is just one example of the pitfalls of a failure to think strategically. Between 2021 and 2026, the previous Government allocated £11.5 billion to the affordable homes programme to subsidise the building of new affordable homes, but in the same period, the New Economics Foundation estimates that the Government are set to subsidise private landlords by more than £70 billion through housing benefit and the housing element of universal credit. We clearly have the balance wrong here. We should be using more of that funding to build up our stock of social homes, locking in the affordability for good, rather than subsidising private landlords, month in, month out; otherwise, the housing benefit bill will continue to rise without giving anyone in housing need the security that they deserve. I endorse the National Housing Federation's call to double the affordable homes programme budget and build 90,000 new social homes a year, which it estimates will add £51 billion to the economy.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD]

While it is true that we need to think long term to fix our broken housing system, people at the sharp end of this crisis need change now. Rough sleeping has risen by 27% in the last year, and 142,000 children are currently housed in temporary accommodation—as we know, families can spend months or even years in unsuitable, so-called temporary accommodation while they languish on the social housing waiting list, which currently stands at over 1 million. We proved that it was possible to make significant progress in tackling rough sleeping during the pandemic when we moved with urgency, so I would appreciate more clarity from the Minister about the Government's ambition for ending rough sleeping.

Even for those who are housed, this can often be in insecure, unaffordable and poor-quality homes. One in five private renters now pays at least half of their income on rent. They cannot wait for decades for the housing market to provide more decent, affordable homes. We need both long-term planning and immediate action for those in acute housing need.

I urge the Government also to pay particular attention to people who spend their lives in the service of others, such as ministers of religion—there are others too—and to ensure that policy-making does not inadvertently make it more difficult to provide housing for them in retirement.

I am pleased that the Government have proposed a new renters' rights Bill. It must offer renters and tenants a fair deal; extend the decent homes standard to the private rented sector; prevent discrimination against families with children and people in receipt of benefits; and abolish no-fault evictions to give tenants the security that they need. On that latter point, the details must be worked through carefully so that the Bill applies fairly to charities among a range of housing providers.

It might seem like an obvious point, but the primary duty of our housing system should be to provide quality homes for all. I welcome the Government's plans to reform and better resource the planning system, and their ambition to build 1.5 million new homes during this Parliament. More housing means more opportunity—something which the Church has recognised, as we seek to use more of our own land for affordable housing.

It is not just about the volume of houses we build. We must also think about quality and affordability, as well as resilience to climate shocks. Will these new homes be, in the words of *Coming Home*, the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community,

“sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying”?

These five values speak to our profound need for community, as we live with and among one another. New housing developments must be built with the social and physical infrastructure that supports people to thrive. The Church stands ready to help with this mission. While developers and local planners can focus on building houses, community groups, charities and faith groups are well placed to build the social support and relational connections which give these new communities a soul.

Housing is not just bricks and mortar. Our housing system should not primarily be an opportunity to amass assets and wealth. It is about people's homes and their lives: where they get a good night's sleep or finally relax on the couch after a long day at work; where they prepare food and eat with family and friends; where they should feel safe and secure. Housing policy must, first and foremost, serve the needs of the people. I look forward to working with the Minister in the coming years to see this vision become a reality.

1.55 pm

Lord Fuller (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, in my maiden speech I am delighted to follow the convention of thanking those who have made me so welcome in your Lordships' House since my introduction in March, including the doorkeepers, the clerks and staff, and the many friends from all sides, but especially from local government, and particularly from my own county of Norfolk. These include my noble friend Lady Shephard of Northwold, as well as my noble friend Lady Eaton, who has provided so much guidance and support.

Since my introduction, I have been seeking a moment to make a mark on two issues that are close to my heart and where I think I can make an informed impact. The first is the business of food production and food security, and the second is the importance of good housing as the foundation of building strong communities. This debate gives me the opportunity to talk about both, because at its heart it is about the two most basic human needs: food in your belly and a roof over your head.

Perhaps I can tell noble Lords a little bit about myself. I have pursued a career in the agricultural supply industry, which for nearly 20 years I combined with the leadership of a local authority in Norfolk, a position I recently relinquished to concentrate on my duties here. I was raised in the Norfolk seaside town of Gorleston-on-Sea, which I am proud to have as my territorial designation. As befitting somebody from the coast, I have a strong belief in the utility of the picture postcard. Keen observers in your Lordships' cloakroom will note that my own peg is illustrated with an image of the superb Gorleston beach rather than my name. I would show you one of these postcards, but as a keen new Member I have learned from the *Companion* that display of visual aids is forbidden during debate.

Gorleston is a wonderful part of Great Yarmouth, a historic borough that provided the homecoming for a Norfolk man, Nelson, upon his victorious return from the Battle of Copenhagen. It now plays an important role in our nation's energy security, having evolved global leadership in many aspects of clean energy production while benefiting from the world's largest wind farm array on our doorstep. I was schooled in Suffolk and graduated from the University of Reading with a degree in agriculture. I clearly remember visiting the farm of the noble Lord, Lord Benyon, as part of our studies. Eyes have often glazed over when I discuss my role in the fertiliser industry but, hey, we all have to eat and my business sits at the foundation and is one of a number of enablers of our entire food chain.

The entire agricultural supply trades support an army of farmers, who have created our countryside and our natural environment and whose dedication,

professionalism and innovation have made our agriculture the most innovative, sophisticated and productive in the whole world, and responsive to external shocks such as the Ukraine situation. The supply industries have innovated the technical advances that prove that there is not a binary choice between farming and wildlife. No longer is there a contest between food production and the environment. They can live alongside each other and be achieved together.

Perhaps more than any other, the food, drink and agriculture sector is dominated by unlisted family-owned businesses. These firms have an eye to the long-term thinking that builds generational wealth in our islands. Not all have deep pockets, but they tend to be embedded in their communities, spending money locally and enjoying the loyalty of staff who work with them for decades. I read the newspapers and am greatly concerned that unlisted family businesses, the bedrock upon which our economy is founded, could be pivoted into short-term thinking, salting away capital rather than investing if mooted changes to property reliefs are introduced. Any Government should tread carefully on capital taxation of such businesses. I know more than most that there is no such thing as unearned income when you put your family's wealth on the line when building a firm to make better futures for those who work with you. Remember, these are the people who feed us.

As a nation that produces only two-thirds of the food we consume, where we have competitive and comparative advantage on matters such as genomics, we should exploit it. But chasing regulatory alignment with our closest neighbours in a way that hobbles our food chain, with counterproductive carbon taxes and trade barriers that do nothing to reduce emissions yet drive up domestic prices, will do nothing to help our exports of beer, bread and cheese to global audiences and help earn our place in the world.

I am grateful that the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, mentioned food security in his opening remarks, but lately it has been overlooked. Food security is something that we must focus on in times of international unrest and extreme weather. We celebrate those who put food on the kitchen table across the nation and deliver that most basic survival need of all—nourishment.

I have another, completely different string to my bow. What I have learned in nearly two decades as a council leader is that when you arrive at the council offices on a Monday morning to find people there with all their possessions in a plastic bag, having been made homeless over the weekend, it focuses the mind. If you cannot sort it, who will? Fixing housing issues is not just about building homes, but it is a critical issue facing us all. Over the years I have chaired two local plans, throughout the 2010s delivering 1% of this nation's entire social housing additions, replaced every home lost to right to buy and more besides, been in the top 10 for the new homes bonus—the reward for delivering houses, not just talking about them—and played a leading role in building physical and social infrastructure up front alongside the construction of new homes.

I know a little bit about this. The planning problem is not just with councils. Councils cop the blame in the press because they hold the ring between the proponents

and the objectors. It is the national agencies, often with their heavy-handed overregulation, that must share the blame for most of the delays and obfuscation in the planning system by adding costs that we cannot afford. While the modernisation of planning committees might be an eye-catching announcement in the press notices yesterday, a clear restatement of the equality of the three limbs of sustainable development—social, economic and environmental—and the recalibration of the balance between them, so that one limb does not have a veto over the others, would be more useful. It is time that the veto over delivering new affordable homes, establishing new communities and building new infrastructure is removed from Natural England, which in my experience, and that of your Lordships' Built Environment Committee, has been found wanting.

Not building new homes does nothing to clean up our rivers. Wheeling out rogue algorithms on bat numbers should not blindly condemn communities to congestion for ever. Forcing councils to hire people in yellow coats to tell ramblers how to walk their dogs in the name of GIRAMS regulations is simply pointless posturing. Preening, self-serving bureaucracy by unaccountable agencies acting as activists rather than as regulators must be rolled back if we are to progress.

It is now clear to me that preventing the reform of nutrient neutrality rules last year might have been good politics, but artisan journeymen such as bricklayers, plumbers, roofers and tilers have been caught in the cross-fire and paid the price in lost work and failed businesses. This has made it even harder for us to meet the targets.

Ah, the targets—we have been in this place before. All I will say is that simply wishing for houses to be built is not a strategy; to make progress here, we need to recognise that there is a world of difference between funding new homes and financing them. Funding is writing the cheque; financing is putting that deal together. They are completely different disciplines. In a world where writing the cheque is not easy, the Government must give more licence to local planning authorities, such as district councils in the travel-to-work areas to which the noble Lord, Lord Lansley, referred and which surround our cities, to set up development corporations, pull deals together and take the risk on upfront infrastructure delivery, with repayment as the new homes are occupied.

I am conscious that I am slightly over time but, as this is my maiden speech, I hope that noble Lords will forgive me. I sat on the CIL review in 2016-17 and—to go into one detail—I find it astonishing that local authorities are prevented from borrowing against projected infrastructure income, in the way that they can with Section 106. I could point to many other examples. Only by fixing such things will we allow more homes to be built. Simply hoping that our wishes come true will not be enough.

Everything that I have done in my career has brought me to this place to talk about these two most consequential issues of our time. I am proud to be debating the importance of good food placed on kitchen tables in new homes—food and shelter. These are the two most basic needs for individuals, without which there can be no true foundations for a healthy society and a vibrant

[LORD FULLER]

economy. I stand by to play my part in helping our nation provide for these needs, and I wish the new Government well in seeking to fulfil them.

2.04 pm

Lord Gascoigne (Con): My Lords, I am delighted to be the first to congratulate my noble friend on an excellent and engaging maiden speech, and to welcome him firmly to these Benches. The great strength of your Lordships' House is that it gathers men and women from across the land who have served the country in many different ways, especially in local government. My noble friend joins those mighty ranks today.

From listening to his maiden speech, it felt like this was a purpose-made debate not just for the humble Address but for my noble friend Lord Fuller himself. Alongside his many and continuing years of service as a councillor, including leading South Norfolk for more than 10 years, my noble friend has advised the Government on housing infrastructure finance and has worked on local government pensions, bringing a wealth of practical knowledge to our House on two pressing issues.

Yet, as we heard from my noble friend, he brings much more to this Chamber: an understanding of the importance of food production; a respect for British farmers and recognition of their enormous worth; a recognition of the importance of building new homes and, crucially, homes that people want to live in; and his love of Norfolk. This is something we share, as my grandparents lived in one of Norfolk's many beautiful seaside villages. I would spend many a happy break there as a kid. As we heard, my noble friend will throw his considerable energies into the work of your Lordships' House. As demonstrated by his maiden speech, this is something from which we will all benefit and to which we look forward.

I turn to the substance of the debate. This is the first time I have spoken since leaving the Front Bench, but also since my party has not been in power. I congratulate my two very good noble friends who I am pleased to see remain on our Front Bench. Long may that continue.

I also congratulate all three Members present on the Government Front Bench, especially the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock. Having previously been a Whip, I have had to sit in many debates in your Lordships' House. Sometimes they are incredibly complex; sometimes, emotional and thought provoking. I have to confess that some have made me feel weary, but that is usually when I have been listening to myself speak. On occasion, I found myself listening to deliberations around nature and hearing the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock. Despite being from a different party, I always found myself—nearly always—in agreement with what she said. She often spoke great sense, so I am genuinely pleased to welcome the noble Baroness to her position on the Front Bench and say power to her elbow.

I declare that I am a patron of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation and part of the parliamentary caucus of the Conservative Environment Network.

Today's debate is about a number of issues at the heart of any modern and growing society: how to more build homes; how to ensure stronger communities that

help deliver a sense of belonging, health and happiness; and, crucially, how to do all this while improving and restoring nature and the environment.

There are bits to welcome in the King's Speech: the continuing efforts to explore and deliver job opportunities with new technology; further employment rights, not least for women who are new mothers; further efforts to tackle violence against women and girls; and seeking to make British rail work—and I mean work—for those who use it. I have one thing to raise: please sort out the cellular network, so that those who use trains can actually do some work while they are on them. Underpinning all this is a general point. The new Government have a mandate to deliver their manifesto, and it is right that we congratulate them on their victory and wish them well. That said, we need to look carefully at the detail of the whole gracious Speech.

Over the last 24 hours, there has been a lot of talk about ambition and no time to waste. First, on housing, I am pleased that there will be legislation to build on what came before on freehold and commonhold, which we said we would deliver if given the chance to serve again. I still bear the scars of carrying through the leasehold and freehold Act in wash-up, throughout which—and in previous days—we were berated that it was not strong enough, that we were letting people down and that Labour would act. The King's Speech says that they will act quickly, which is good, but is there any more detail on when, or what that would encompass?

On housing more broadly, I am not going to enter the fray of whether a top-down target is better than a more bottom-up approach. I have been there and got the T-shirt from having to defend the then position as a Whip, as my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham can testify. Everyone agrees on the need to build more homes, and all the talk and determination about building many more homes is welcome, and hugely so, if only that would fix the problem.

In building any new housing, it is right that the infrastructure is there, not least to make it feasible. Again, if only other Governments had looked at ways of speeding up delivery. Anything that is seeking to streamline the process is welcome, but there is a question about funding and what in reality is the definition of speeding up. For new housing schemes, it is not just about the transport infrastructure but about what else comes with it. What makes a community, and what makes people want to live and enjoy their time in that area? It is shops and access to public services, but also green spaces.

Environment and nature matter, and there is talk about using development to fund nature recovery, but what does that mean in practice? Does that now mean that new developments will have to increase nature and biodiversity, and is nature now classed as infrastructure? I am not criticising this, and it is commendable, but there is not much else about nature either in the Speech itself or in the accompanying briefing document, despite what was in the Government's manifesto. If this is it—I heard the brief mention in the opening remarks by the noble Lord, Lord Hunt—given the scale of the briefing on the determination to build more homes, what steps are to be put in place to constantly improve our nature and biodiversity beyond this measure?

Some have already raised the issue of water companies, and everyone agrees that industry must do better, yet I hope that in due course the relevant Bill will do more than penalise failing companies—right as that is—and look at driving investment and the support that farmers need too.

Finally, I turn to one vast swathe of policy which I am afraid is completely absent. It is not farming, fishing or rural communities. It is not even the crucial global ocean treaty. Before the election, Labour said many things on animal welfare, yet where is the ban on trophy hunting imports? Where is the end to puppy smuggling? In my view, these are easy wins, and they were in their manifesto. In the midst of the election period, the then shadow Secretary of State said that a vote for Labour is a vote for animals and that they would ban the import of foie gras, but where is it? Thankfully, animals did not have a vote or they too would be scratching their heads, a bit like me.

I recognise that my party was in power for a significant amount of time, and although I often pushed hard for much more, alongside a few others, I think we can be proud of the advances we made over recent years, especially with the animal welfare action plan and the Ivory Act, and on the blue belt and, most recently, on live exports.

I know some will say that this King's Speech is just a start and that more is yet to come, and I hope that is true. As I said, there are some good bits in the programme. However, with so much hype, when we were told only hours ago that there is no time to waste and that the Government are full of ambition, and when you combine that with the public good will and a huge majority to make real change happen, I cannot help feeling that this is also a bit of a missed opportunity.

A year ago today, I was introduced to your Lordships' House. Not long after, I gave my maiden speech in a King's Speech debate on the environment. Among other things, I focused on levelling up and nature. Speeches that day called on the Government to do more. The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, was speaking from the Front Bench and I from the Back Benches. Here we are again today. Plus ça change.

Time is short. The people rightly want things to happen and now, and there is still much to do. But I am one of life's optimists and, thankfully, there is always a tomorrow.

2.13 pm

Baroness Harris of Richmond (LD) [V]: My Lords, I too send my best wishes to the new Government and their Front Bench. I wish them well in the future. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, on his dynamic maiden speech.

I will speak about the Yorkshire Dales' environment, primarily our national park, which I am fortunate enough to have on my doorstep in Richmond. The landscape and environment there attract hundreds of thousands of visitors every year but are also home to many small communities and hamlets, as well as dozens of farmers who work and maintain that unique area of our country.

It is that farming environment about which I will concentrate my remarks. I am indebted to Jane Le Cocq of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the

senior farm conservation adviser, for her help and briefing notes, as well as to our excellent House of Lords Library for its notes on environmental land management and changes to the sustainable farming incentive and Countryside Stewardship schemes, as well as the NFU briefings and those from Zero Hour, the campaign for climate and nature, on the Climate and Nature Bill.

The farm team of the Yorkshire Dales National Park—the YDNP—has developed a holistic approach and guidance to farm business, water quality and biodiversity over the past 25 years. It works with around a thousand farms within the national park boundary, and helps and supports more than a hundred farmers to apply for stand-alone capital grants. It does this by improving farmyard infrastructure in slurry handling, field drainage and water holding features et cetera. It helps farmers to understand and apply for various agri-environmental schemes, such as the new environmental land management scheme, ELMS. Upland farmers do not have many options when it comes to land management, but they are interested in low-input grassland management and breeding water habitat management, as well as looking at other key environmental benefits specifically aimed at improving soil, water and air quality. I am sure that this is a good thing for all our national parks.

Reducing pollutants from farming, which affects our rivers, is essential. Your Lordships will know what those are, so I do not need to rehearse them here. However, as noted by the Environment Agency, the pressures and impacts on water quality caused by these pollutants affect a whole range of activities, including growth of algae in water, loss of biodiversity, silting of fish spawning grounds and drainage to fisheries, tourism and recreation—not to mention risk to human health through drinking water, and bather and water sports, as we have seen recently.

It is all the more important, then, that the catchment sensitive farming, or CSF, initiative operated in the Yorkshire Dales National Park area shows evidence of a lower use of pesticides—it was 25% lower than in 2006-07—and sediment reductions that average between 12% and 36%, which have led to invertebrate improvement in water and phosphate reductions of between 7% and 23%. The CSF initiative works collaboratively with both internal and external partners for wildlife conservation, trees and woodlands, the historic environment and development management, the external partners being of course the National Trust, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Millennium Trust, the Rivers Trust and Defra.

Since the inception of ELMS, which replaced the basic payment scheme, farmers can be paid for actions that support food production, as your Lordships know, and improve farm productivity and resilience while also promoting and improving the environment. Most dales farmers should be able to enter the sustainable farming incentive scheme—the SFI scheme—or the Countryside Stewardship scheme, which aims to protect and enhance the natural environment, such as our spectacular hay meadows restoration, which is so desperately needed since the intensification of farming has made many of them disappear.

I understand that, from this summer, money will be provided for our dry-stone walling maintenance, species-rich grassland maintenance, haymaking supplement

[BARONESS HARRIS OF RICHMOND]

and significant payments for rivers, streams and flood plains, barn maintenance and agroforestry. It will not be before time as, according to the group Friends of the Dales, there has been a significant loss of species and habitats in recent years, with the dales' moorland biodiversity damaged through heather burning, excessive drainage and the persecution of birds of prey.

However, the transition between one type of payment to another is taking time, and farmers need to know whether our new Government intend to carry on with their predecessors' intent, which was not to fully implement the changeover until 2027.

Will the Government offer simplification of what has been an overcomplex application for farmers to navigate? In December 2023, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee was critical of the implementation of the scheme so far, and found that

"it is a step in the right direction, but more clarity and certainty is required in relation to what farmers need to do, the amount of funding available, and how ELMs will support the Government's goals for food security and environmental protection".

Will the Minister say how the scheme is being implemented and whether this Government will give a firm commitment to our farmers that they will simplify and speed up the payments in order to help them provide the food we need, the environment we wish to enjoy and the habitat to enable all wildlife to flourish?

Finally, a new concern is the Government's stated aim to build thousands more much needed houses in the country. I hope this this will not impact adversely on our natural countryside, and definitely not on the sparsely populated upper dales. The Yorkshire dales are exquisitely special. They must remain so.

2.20 pm

Lord Crisp (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord the Minister and the noble Baroness the Minister who are opening and closing this debate on their appointments. I wish them well in their new roles and look forward to constructive engagement on many of these issues. Similarly, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, and the noble Baroness, Lady Swinburne, and wish them every success in effective challenge. Finally, on congratulations, I turn to the excellent and very powerful speech by the noble Lord, Lord Fuller. I particularly appreciated his comments about housing and communities, and the important links between the two. I can see he is going to bring enormous experience to bear in this House.

I am going to talk about planning and housing, with reference to the environment. I welcome a great deal of what is being proposed by the Government in their legislation on renters reform, leasehold and commonhold reform, Awaab's Bill—which noble Lords may recall is about the responsibility of landlords to do repairs promptly, as opposed to damaging health as in that particular sad case—the commitment to social housing, much of the changing policy on planning, the proposals I have seen on new towns, and extending the decent housing standard to the private rented sector. If I may say so, I particularly appreciated the presentation of these issues by the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, pointing out that this is about good-quality, safe housing,

which is the foundation for an entire life—a theme picked up by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford.

However, I have some questions and concerns. I shall start with housing. There is an issue here around perhaps too much emphasis on numbers. Some of this is going to feel like déjà vu to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, but it is important that we emphasise quality and standards in this debate. I am coming at it from the point of view of health and the way in which poor-quality housing damages the health of individuals, and indeed of whole communities. It is not just about numbers; it is about quality and standards, and being fit for purpose.

The worst example of this, which we have often cited, is the permitted development regulations, and I have not seen any comment on that at all, although I may have missed it. Although there are clearly going to be improvements in various bits of the system, my first question is: how will the Government ensure that there are improvements in quality across the whole housing development system, with particular reference to permitted development?

It is not just about individual units but about communities and place. Again, the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, recognised and referred to that. I had experience of that back in the 1970s, as a result of the positive policy of slum clearances. I was working in Halewood, in Knowsley, where there were just houses and, as I recall, a police station in parts of that area, with the obvious results and problems that that brought forward. There is another question here that I know is difficult to answer, but I would still like to ask it: how do the Government propose to enable the development of communities? You cannot mandate communities at a national level, so how will they enable and support the creation of communities as part of development—not just creating housing estates but helping to create communities?

I emphasise these points about quality and community because there is a real temptation just to go for the numbers. I speak as someone with experience in health, who was responsible for implementing the NHS plan from 2000, as the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, will be aware. Getting things moving takes time. There is a mobilisation stage when, as people have said, there is a need for skills and to get money, people and training in the right place, and there will be a temptation to hammer the numbers and let go of quality. I have to say with regret that, to some extent, we did that in health in the early years: we pushed too hard on the numbers of staff, for example, but not enough on quality. There is a balance to be carefully struck between pressing for the numbers and making sure that the development of housing is about quality, safety, liveability and supporting people's lives. I agree with the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, about the importance of having a long-term strategy and a plan with stages in it, moving forward bit by bit towards the long-term goal and recognising that that will take time.

I conclude with two issues that are more about principles and philosophy. The first is on planning. The narrative of planning is broadly all about it being in the way. That is the issue described in the media at

the moment, and it is what one would take away from a lot of what the new Government have already said. It is, of course, significantly true, but only partly. Over the last three years something like 320,000 planning consents have been agreed every year but only something like 200,000 developments have been started each year, so there is a gap between what is consented to and what is actually delivered. As the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, has pointed out, there are other fundamental issues here, including funding. His points were made very well. The new Government cannot duck the argument and discussion about funding and place all the emphasis on planning; there are issues about funding that need to be resolved here if these great goals are going to be implemented. The emphasis on streamlining planning is good, but these clear aims need to be set out.

When I was thinking about this debate, I wondered what planning is actually for. It feels like quite a technical, technocratic sort of subject, as opposed to something that is done in order to create communities and places where people want to live. From my perspective, there needs to be a focus in planning on health and well-being. At the moment, there is no such focus at all within the regulation. The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, will recognise the point that I have been making—that planning should promote health, safety and well-being in housing but also in communities—but there is no reference to that at the moment.

There is a second issue here about local democracy. When looking at what is happening, there are legitimate questions to be asked about what should be done nationally and what should be done locally. That needs to be spelled out. The review of planning that needs to take place should look at fundamental questions around why we have the planning system, what it is trying to achieve, and what the relationship is and the boundaries are between the various sectors that the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, referred to. That may be clear to people within the system, but to someone like me it is not.

My final point comes from the experience of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill earlier this year, and is about how much health, well-being and environment are linked. That kept coming up during the debates on the Bill. There is an important narrative and story to tell here. The vision for the future and what needs to happen around housing planning cannot just be transactional and technocratic; it has to be practical—it is about the delivery of what people need and want—but there needs to be a wider vision and strategy.

2.29 pm

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): My Lords, I turn back to energy and of course nuclear power in particular. I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests as an adviser to Terrestrial Energy, a generation IV Canadian technology company.

I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, on an excellent and meaty maiden speech—the first of many valuable contributions to your Lordships' House, I am sure. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on their appointments; they have both given wise counsel to the House. I was also reassured by his opening speech. I am glad that the new Government

recognise the challenges of the energy trilemma and that they will continue the good work of the previous Government and speed up the delivery of a domestic clean economy. As was said in the King's Speech, the Government are determined to lead

“the development of the technologies of the future”.

Net zero cannot be achieved without nuclear power, which absolutely encompasses the technologies of the future. The last Government went some way towards this—albeit too slowly—by putting in place the legislative environment, a dedicated Minister and a public body in the shape of Great British Nuclear, which together aimed to deliver the renaissance that the nuclear industry desperately needs. We once led the world in nuclear technologies. In some we still do, but we could become a world leader in all of fusion, fission and fuels if we could just get a move on. By all means build at gigawatt scale but not at the expense of the small, advanced and micro technologies. This Government just need to quicken the pace.

Why? It is because nuclear energy is a vital low-carbon source of energy for the UK. While renewables such as wind and solar are important in achieving net-zero ambitions, nuclear provides the essential baseload required to meet the increasing demand for reliable energy while keeping emissions low. As the noble Baroness, Lady Moyo, so eloquently warned in her exceptional speech, AI and data centres will result in an explosion of demand for power. Nuclear is the most sustainable energy source; it has the lowest life-cycle carbon footprint and is the only low-carbon energy available 24/7, making it essential to meeting these needs. The nuclear industry is also crucial to economic growth and job creation. Over 77,000 people currently work in that industry, with the majority of these jobs outside London and the south-east. However, the UK must train tens of thousands of additional workers if the Government are to meet the target to deliver 24 gigawatts of nuclear by 2050.

I hope that this Government will continue to support the work of the nuclear skills taskforce, as well as the many outstanding apprenticeship schemes throughout the industry, notably those with the UKAEA, Rolls-Royce, and EDF at Hinkley Point. Some of those at Hinkley Point relocated from Anglesey when the Horizon project failed. I sincerely hope that this Government will continue their plans to redevelop Wylfa. If not at gigawatt scale then please release it quickly as a site for SMRs, as either would enable this young skilled workforce to return home. Incidentally, while it is not one of the industrial heartlands of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, it is one that is very close to my heart and desperately needs good-quality, well-paid employment—as does Cumbria, another area which cannot be described as an industrial heartland, an observation that will not be missed by his noble friend Lady Hayman of Ullock.

It was also welcome to see the announcement of a sustainable aviation fuel revenue support mechanism Bill, to support the transition to sustainable flying. Of the multiple SAF production routes, those using nuclear energy inputs offer the greatest emissions reduction, and production on a scale sufficient to meet future commercial demand. The Bill can enable designers such as Rolls-Royce SMR, Westinghouse SMR, newcleo and SAF developers, such as the British company

[BARONESS BLOOMFIELD OF HINTON WALDRIST]

Equilibrium, to position the UK as a world leader in commercial nuclear SAF production. Supported by this Bill, these companies offer the UK access to a huge international market in a rare economic and social opportunity to deliver UK growth and thousands of well-paid jobs, while slashing emissions from aviation.

As a stark reminder of the challenge, I point out that the UK will generate the same amount of nuclear power in 2024 as it did in 1976, and less than half that which it did in 2000, with most of our existing capacity to be retired by the end of this decade. While we welcome the progress made at Hinkley and Sizewell, the new Government must build on the Conservative Government's strong support for nuclear and capitalise on the significant and historic opportunities brought about by new technologies. Just one SMR has the ability to generate up to the equivalent of 150 onshore wind turbines, and benefits from being manufactured at a plant and transported to a site for installation.

While a focus on SMRs would be welcome, it should not be the full focus of the Government. Advanced modular reactors have the potential significantly to support the UK's net-zero transition. Not only do AMRs offer the ability to recycle reprocessed spent fuel and thereby close the fuel cycle; they could be sited alongside data centres in positions not previously designated as nuclear sites. Many developers of such reactors are keen to progress their projects here in the UK as soon as possible, in some cases using only private finance. For example, Europe's fastest-growing energy company, newcleo, is willing to advance a project to final investment decision at pace—indeed, multiple projects on multiple sites—without drawing on taxpayer money.

What they need is a level playing field. This means that potential sites for development need to be released by the Government/GBN to developers in a timely manner, and not just land-banked for the winners of the SMR or subsequent competitions. The top-down, winner-takes-all and government-subsidised approach needs to be replaced by an enabling and empowering platform on which developers can raise finance and progress their projects as soon as possible.

Key to this will be quickly progressing agreements regarding the revenue support mechanism of choice—namely, if certain conditions are met and it falls below a certain price, the power generated by developers will be purchased. A simple contract for difference would achieve this and open the floodgates to foreign investment into UK nuclear. The contrast with the situation in, for example, France, is stark. There, the Government are actively helping projects find the right sites and providing much earlier assurance on revenue support, thereby removing the five to six years of project risk borne solely by the developers before a financial investment decision is made.

I urge the Minister to meet the advanced nuclear developers as soon as possible and to work together to find a way to progress multiple projects simultaneously and at pace. There is no net zero without nuclear, and there will be no 24 gigawatts of nuclear by 2050 without new advanced nuclear. This is an urgent matter of necessity and not just ambition. I wish the new Government well in their endeavours.

2.36 pm

Lord Curry of Kirkharle (CB): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on their appointments as Ministers. It is very good news indeed.

I wish to address a number of issues related to agricultural and environmental policy. My interests are recorded in the register, but I draw the House's attention to my trusteeship of Clinton Devon Estates and to the fact that I chair Food and Farming Futures. I am a member of the NFU and CLA.

I will first comment on the land use framework. I very much welcome the Government's commitment to publishing a framework. I was on the Land Use in England Committee of this House and encourage the Ministers to revisit the report, which we on the committee believe provides a very helpful list of important recommendations. I would like to mention two particular issues.

First, there is a need to include food security as a key priority within the land use framework. I very much welcome the Government's commitment, repeated by the Minister this morning, that food security is national security. I look forward to seeing how that commitment will be reflected in policy changes and what might be proposed.

As far as the land use framework is concerned, it is essential that the quality of land and its potential to contribute to the production of food is taken into account when planning permission is sought for developments. I appreciate the Government's desire to get Britain building again and the need to help stimulate economic growth through their housing ambition, but there is a potential conflict between raiding the green belt to build more houses and a commitment to food security. Much green-belt land is of high quality and could be essential for the production of food in future. It is often too easy to see green belt as a cheaper alternative to the development of brownfield sites, but if an impact assessment were to include the long-term effects of climate change and the loss of food production from these sites, the outcome might look very different.

Many would argue that a relatively small percentage of our total landmass is required, but climate change and the impact of extreme weather events are seriously challenging our ability to grow crops in many geographical areas. Conventional farming practices are under threat, and we need to protect the areas that are capable of providing food in future. However important they may be, housing developments, infrastructure projects, the planting of trees, biodiversity net gain and solar panels are removing a significant area of productive farmland, which is definitely impacting our ability to be self-sufficient. Local authorities need to draft local plans that take this into account, and planners must be clear about it when granting permission for development. Food security must be a planning priority. I would be interested in the Minister's response on this issue.

The second issue relating to the land use framework is that of governance. We members of the committee were concerned about the discipline required in implementing the framework once it is released. It will require complete buy-in from all government departments

and commitment from all mayoral combined authorities and local authorities. That is a huge task that will require serious oversight. We recommend in our report that a commission be established to provide that accountability. I would be interested to hear how the Government plan to deliver on that requirement.

The next topic to mention is the environmental land management scheme, which was introduced by the previous Government to transition from the support provided by the EU's common agricultural policy. The sustainable farming incentive is a key part of ELMS. It has been evolving over the past three years, and it needs to evolve further. I would be interested to hear from the Minister whether the new Government are committed to the policy they have inherited and what changes, if any, they wish to make.

There is a deep concern among many farmers, particularly those farming in the pastoral and upland areas of England, that the SFI does not currently recognise the economic, environmental and social value of these family farms. Many feel threatened by the pace of change. I request that Defra review the options available within the SFI to make sure that family farms in critical landscapes are provided with appropriate options within the scheme. I shall give the House an example that could have unintended consequences. Under the current options, it is financially advantageous for livestock farms to plough out valuable permanent pasture and sow it with a flower-rich meadow mixture. That cannot be right.

Investment in science and skills is also hugely important for the agricultural and horticultural sectors. The Minister may be aware that I was involved in the establishment of TIAH—the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture—to improve skills across the sector, and that Defra has been very supportive, for which I am grateful. I also continue to work closely with the science community. We are on the brink of a technology and data revolution in these important sectors, and I hope that the Government will recognise that we cannot deliver economic growth and improve our productivity without investment. For too long we have lagged behind our global competitors; our productivity record is not good enough. But we have the capability to regain that position as global leaders, provided that we invest in skills and the application and delivery of scientific knowledge.

Farmers and growers are proud of their record and have always been willing to embrace change, but they need a sense of direction. Everyone in agriculture is fully aware that we are on a pacy journey but there is no clear destination or vision. It will be good if the Government share the ambition of the agricultural and horticultural industries and are willing to work in partnership to define what “good” would look like in 10 years' time. We stand by, ready to help, and look forward to working with the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on this. I very much support the contribution of the noble Baroness, Lady Harris, who appeared on screen earlier.

I have two final issues to refer to. The first is the Government's ambition to source 50% of public sector food from domestic suppliers, mentioned by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans. Of course, I very much welcome that ambition—but we have been down this road before. Under the previous Labour Government, the noble Lord, Lord Whitty—who is

not in his seat—and I made significant progress on sourcing sustainable local food for the public sector: schools, hospitals, prisons and departmental catering contracts. It is very worth while, but it is hard work. Importantly, the Government need to be aware that it will have financial implications. Can we please look back at the lessons learned from our former efforts, and consult the noble Lord, Lord Whitty?

I commend the Government's ambition to review our trading relationship with the European Union. We need much easier access to European markets than we currently have for our high-quality produce, and I wish the negotiators well. As a former chair of the Better Regulation Executive, I was disappointed that the previous Government did not deliver sufficiently on their promise to reduce regulatory burdens following our decision to leave the EU. To reduce the burden of regulation at the same time as renegotiating a new deal with the EU will be tricky, but it needs to be done. I would be interested to hear from the Minister what the Government's plans are in this respect. Having negotiated international trade deals that could potentially disadvantage our farmers and growers, and at the same time having limited access to our nearest market, is a double whammy for our industry. We have a great opportunity to market our produce around the world using our high standards of environmental management and animal welfare. We need a supportive Government to realise these opportunities.

2.45 pm

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Curry of Kirkharle. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, on his maiden speech.

The King's Speech—the gracious Speech—heralds a welcome step change in our politics, with a range of policies and legislation to be implemented by the new Labour Government under Prime Minister Starmer and his ministerial team. I welcome our Front-Bench Ministers, my noble friends Lord Hunt of Kings Heath and Lady Hayman of Ullock. I look forward to working with and supporting them in a positive environment where politics is a lever for economic growth, supporting and improving the lives of communities throughout the UK.

It would be remiss of me if I failed to mention a particular Northern Ireland aspect, which I welcome, although it is not integral to today's debate. My noble friend Lord Murphy of Torfaen was particularly involved in this with me. I welcome the procedures to be put in place to repeal the Northern Ireland legacy legislation. I welcome the fact that, after working in consultation with all parties, measures will be brought forward to begin the process of repealing and replacing the misnamed and totally inappropriate Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

Today I will concentrate on the environment. During the last few days, I reflected on our Labour manifesto for the 2024 election, which stated that Labour would give regulators the power to “block the payment of bonuses” to the executives of water companies that fail to prevent pollution. It also said that Labour would “bring criminal charges against persistent law breakers”—

[BARONESS RITCHIE OF DOWNPATRICK]

hence the very welcome water Bill, which is in the King's Speech. I kept looking at Twitter—now called X—over the last few weeks, and I saw my fellow countryman, Feargal Sharkey, highlighting the pollution problems with all the rivers throughout the UK.

This manifesto, and therefore the King's Speech, committed to expanding nature-rich habitats, such as wetlands, peat bogs and forests. It said that Labour would improve access to natural environments by developing new national river walks and national forests in England. This has a direct cross-cutting connection with health, growing our economy and developing our tourism industry, which includes economic spend.

In this respect, I look forward to that further development and the outworking of the planning and infrastructure Bill, which no doubt will deal with those issues. The briefing note to the gracious Speech says:

“Change will take time. The Government will outline further legislation to fundamentally transform our water industry and restore our rivers, lakes and seas to good health”.

What shape will that further legislation take? I would like it if my noble friend Lady Hayman of Ullock could elaborate on that.

Like Peers for the Planet and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, who spoke earlier, I firmly believe that this Parliament and this Government have the critical task of delivering the UK's 2030 climate and nature targets and setting the course to 2050. Early policy decisions that drive emissions reduction will be needed alongside urgent action to adapt to physical climate risks and protect and restore our valuable natural landscape.

As a resident of and former public representative in Northern Ireland, I hope that the new Government can help to influence environmental policy there—although it is devolved. Perhaps the Minister could indicate when she intends to meet the relevant Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive to discuss joint plans for developing and conserving our whole environment in the UK, but also ensuring that our natural asset is central to the development of our economy and the health and well-being of all our citizens.

Our manifesto said that the UK faced a “nature crisis” accelerated by climate change and argued that the UK had become one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. It committed to tackling pollution in rivers and seas—I think of one of the largest lakes in these islands, Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, which is again polluted with algae this year. There needs to be a means of addressing that. Perhaps the Minister could talk to her equivalent in the Northern Ireland Executive so that there can be joint action on tackling these environmental problems.

Our manifesto also said that we would improve the ability of central and local government and emergency services to respond to natural emergencies and coastal erosion. Will that be done through future legislation? Many of us have witnessed the devastating effect of flooding on our communities, businesses, environment and farmland. What joint action with the devolved regions, including the Northern Ireland Executive, will take place to spearhead action and the recovery of our environment, and in turn enable economic growth and the well-being of all?

As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, referred to earlier, the Climate Change Committee produced its latest report only today for the attention of government, particularly on net zero, the economy and how we deal with climate change. I hope that there is in that report some food for thought for and assistance to our new Labour Government to help them address these issues. I welcome the actions outlined in the gracious Speech to deal with climate change, because the latest government analysis concludes that acting now to adapt to climate impacts could deliver significant amounts of money and up to £10 in net economic benefits for every £1 invested.

I welcome the emphasis in the gracious Speech on better management of our environment. It is worth noting that the Office for National Statistics estimates the financial and societal value of natural resources in the UK to be £1.8 trillion, and the Green Finance Institute has warned that the deterioration of the UK's natural environment could lead to an estimated 6% to 12% loss to gross domestic product by the 2030s. Nature and the environment are vital to our economy, our health and well-being, and protection from extreme weather.

On a final point, I see that the territorial extent of the Great British Energy Bill applies to all of the UK. Northern Ireland and Ireland have a single electricity market, so how will this Bill fit into that electricity market, and what assurances can be given that it will not undermine the all-island electricity market in Ireland?

This gracious Speech contains the ingredients for successful conservation and development of our environment. Nature restoration, protection of our agricultural base and natural habitats, and the reduction in chemical pollution of our lands are all vital facets, and environment, health, well-being and economic growth are all interconnected. That is borne out by this Government, and I believe will lead to success for all our citizens.

2.55 pm

Lord Harlech (Con): My Lords, I declare my farming and land management interests in Wales as set out in the register. It is a great pleasure to participate in this humble Address on three of the most pressing issues of our time. Farming is an absent theme from any day of the debate on the humble Address, and rural communities were not mentioned in His Majesty the King's gracious Speech. However, I know, with the appointment of the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, as the Minister, that this is merely an oversight, not an indicator of the new Government's lack of interest.

We know that British farmers are concerned but also ambitious for the future. With policies that revitalise business confidence, the new Government can kick-start economic growth, deliver affordable, climate-friendly, high-welfare food, improve the environment, and stimulate clean energy supply. The Government must set secure and ambitious agricultural budgets for England and Wales. Food security and environmental delivery can be achieved only with a proper budget, which should be £4 billion in England and £1 billion in Wales.

Phasing out direct payments has required changes in many businesses to maintain profitable farming. Many studies suggest that the scale of funding needed to meet the targets in the Agriculture Acts of England

and Wales is higher than current funding. Although private sector finance will be welcome, these markets still need to be established, and the level of funding that they will provide still needs to be determined.

Applications for higher-tier and mid-tier Countryside Stewardship in 2023 were higher than in preceding years, demonstrating the industry's commitment to deliver for the environment. Given the increasing popularity of these schemes, an increasingly large figure will be needed to fund them. Farmers have started getting behind environmental land management schemes, and the uptake is positive. Uncertainty will damage this promising outlook. A vote of confidence in the schemes from the Treasury that the resources needed to invest in them will remain will help to give confidence to those still wavering, driving uptake further still. I also hope that the new Government build on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act to support industries such as vertical farming, which will increase food production and security while reducing the carbon footprint.

New pressures are also pushing the agriculture budget to stretch further. Most of the woodland creation targets are funded outside the agriculture budget by the five-year nature for climate fund, which finishes this year. However, the scheme's delivery is expected to be included in ELMS from 2024, which will add pressure if the budget is not increased to accommodate new requests.

The situation in Wales is much more challenging, and there are serious questions about whether the budget will be available to deliver the new schemes as we advance or even maintain the funding for existing ones, which will be vital in meeting the Welsh Government's environmental and climate targets. The relationship between the Welsh Government and the farming community must be reset. A clearly defined agriculture budget allocated and ring-fenced for these specific aims would end the uncertainty and resentment that has been created.

Bridging the productivity gap between rural and urban areas in Wales could significantly contribute to the UK's economic growth, adding £43 billion to the national GVA. With targeted support and investment, rural businesses in Wales can spearhead growth, create quality jobs and enhance prosperity across communities. This must be done by providing clarity and support for sustainable farming practices and environmental stewardship, alongside funding; by reforming the planning system to expedite development and permitted development rights, and support sustainable growth; by offering fiscal incentives and support to boost rural tourism and business innovation, while doing away with incredibly harmful disincentives such as the tourism tax; by promoting investment in renewable energy projects and improving grid infrastructure, including inside national parks; by ensuring robust food security measures and promoting the provenance of Welsh produce and other world-class UKGI food produce from across the United Kingdom to boost trade exports; and by investing in broadband and transport links to improve access and integration in rural areas.

Over the past decade, demand for housing in rural areas has grown faster than in urban areas, outstripping supply and making the countryside unaffordable for

many who live and work there, while rural housing policy has been left behind. To deliver affordable homes, the Government must build more homes in rural communities, with the philosophy of a small number of houses in a large number of villages. They must also make it easier to convert agricultural buildings into homes in national parks and national landscapes, and enable the repurposing of redundant agricultural buildings and sites. They must incentivise land to be brought forward for affordable housing, and help with funding for decarbonising rural, and specifically listed, buildings, where there should be VAT parity when repairing and maintaining listed buildings, as with new builds.

As my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham mentioned, bolstering local planning departments is good news. However, local authorities must have trusted planners who can advise on agricultural planning applications. Access to this expertise is critical, and I would like Defra to act in an advisory role to ensure adequate guidance is given to local communities. Updating the planning practice guidance to include explanatory notes on farming activity and the rationale for applications would be a simple solution to ensure that the planning system does not prevent this vital investment for farming businesses. Where major infrastructure projects have the potential to disrupt and damage farmland and farm businesses, steps must be taken to ensure that farms can keep operating profitably and that they are properly and promptly compensated for any land taken and damage caused.

Our best and most fertile agricultural land must be utilised for food production. Lower-quality agricultural land or brownfield sites can be prioritised for new housing, infrastructure projects and land use for emissions offsetting. This would allow us to safeguard food security while investing in communities and infrastructure. While many farmers want to invest in producing renewable energy, they continuously find themselves constrained due to planning issues. We urgently need the Government to push local authorities to recognise that small-scale energy generation can help farm businesses become more sustainable.

To conclude, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Fuller on an excellent maiden speech, and the noble Lord the Minister—who is not in his place—and the noble Baroness the Minister on their appointments. I wish them the very best of luck in their endeavours and implore them not to forget that, while solar panels and wind turbines are great, you cannot eat them. The farmer feeds us all.

3.02 pm

The Earl of Devon (CB): My Lords, it is always a poignant honour to attend His Majesty's gracious Speech in this House, perhaps never more so than when it may be the very last to which I am invited. Earls of Devon have served in Parliament since the time of Queen Matilda and the ealdormen of Devon supported our Saxon monarchy long before then. It will be sad day, if and when we do say farewell. Some may say that 1,000 years' service is quite enough, and they may have a point.

Given that this debate's focus is upon sustainability, the environment, communities and local government, I should note that sustainable local community service

[THE EARL OF DEVON]

is literally within my DNA and that of most of our hereditary colleagues. The loss of multigenerational, regional and apolitical counsel that will result from the final abolition of hereditary Peers can only encourage the short-term politicisation of your Lordships' House and increase the governance for votes and for profits that has so decimated the green and pleasant land that we steward for generations to come. I will not go meekly, so I am glad that His Majesty has set forth such an extensive legislative agenda, albeit there are surprising omissions. I look forward to improving, as best we can, the legislation proposed, and I will aim to do so for the benefit of Devon in particular, the county in which I live and work, and whose interests my family has long championed.

The Labour Government are to be congratulated upon their electoral success, turning a surprisingly modest share of the vote into a remarkable majority of seats. I hope only that they deploy the same administrative alchemy in meeting some of the immense challenges they have set, not least the navigation of our labyrinthine planning system to liberate housebuilding and infrastructure on an unprecedented scale while also enhancing food security, protecting biodiversity and the environment, and building resilience to inevitable climate change. This will be far harder than winning the election. I look forward to assisting for as long as I am permitted to do so.

I note my interests in the register as a lawyer and a heritage land manager in Devon. In particular, I note my membership of the Devon Housing Commission, which is due to publish tomorrow its report on the acute housing crisis that bedevils our county. Under the tireless chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Best, the commission has spent 12 months investigating the parlous shortage of housing for those living and working in Devon. We make many recommendations that are applicable to coastal, rural and market town communities across the country. I will not steal the commission's thunder, but I ask that the Minister undertakes to consider the report closely when it is received. Its recommendations to the Government echo the comments of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans, including the need to fund affordable housing, the need to support regional developers, the need to develop skills and staffing in local planning and in the retrofitting of housing stock, and the crucial importance of delivering diverse and accessible housing to sustain healthy local communities.

The Government's intentions with respect to housebuilding, infrastructure and renewable energy are to be applauded, particularly given the professed sustainability of their ambitions, but such development activity within our landscape will necessarily impact biodiversity and consume vast quantities of natural capital in the pursuit of economic growth. It is therefore crucial that the regulatory guard-rails to ensure development is sustainable are fit for purpose. Are the Government confident that biodiversity net gain is working as designed and will not be an insurmountable drag on development? How satisfied are the Government that marine net gain rules can be adequately introduced and enforced to ensure that their offshore renewable ambitions do not deplete yet further our decimated

marine ecosystems? Is the Minister content that the rules for nutrient neutrality are robust and sufficiently understood to withstand the impact of the Government's ambitious building agenda? Finally, do we have a water and sewage industry that is remotely capable of supplying fresh water to the promised millions of new homes while sustainably removing their waste?

I note the plans for yet further regulation of water companies, including the punishment of their leaders, but surely the issue is not a lack of regulation—the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, has had such success in that regard—but a lack of ambition and resource in the regulator. Driving private water companies into liquidation while discouraging anyone from taking a leadership role due to punitive personal liability does not appear to be the solution to the problem, which is the need for capital and infrastructure investment on a Victorian scale.

As for omissions from the gracious Speech, where is reference to the land use framework? It seems foolhardy to introduce a framework only after committing to economic growth via an ambitious housing and infrastructure programme. The land use framework will be complicated and challenging to implement, but without it we will inevitably see commercial development riding roughshod over the less economic but more important imperatives of food security, biodiversity and natural capital.

The harvest started at home today, so perhaps a more ominous omission from the gracious Speech was any mention of agriculture, as we have heard. *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson famously told us of the biodiversity disaster inherent in modern farming. This Government's deafening silence on farming may be as disastrous. We are in the midst of the most substantial agricultural transition in decades. It is such an uncertain time for agriculture and the security of our nation's food that to have no commitment on farming is simply remarkable. What are the Government's plans for ELMS? Will they maintain Countryside Stewardship? What plans do they have for local nature recovery? Should farmers simply abandon food production and nature conservation and devote their land entirely to houses and wind farms? The Government need to be clear about what we are to do.

I note the manifesto commitment to public procurement of sustainable food, as the noble Lord, Lord Curry, mentioned, and look forward to supporting this initiative, but it too was absent from the gracious Speech. The Plunkett Foundation is commissioning a review of rural food retail—which I might chair—which could provide important data to inform this initiative. I also note a recent regional project, the South West Food Hub, which explored the challenges and potential solutions to enable local government food procurement.

On local governance, the manifesto lauds regional devolution. Can the noble Baroness give any indication of the status of Devon and Torbay's application for combined county authority status? This will be a key initiative, with particular significance for housing and planning, that chimes very well with the Government's stated ambitions. Perhaps, once evicted from your Lordships' House, the Earl of Devon can return to regional governance, from whence he emerged in the Dark Ages.

Finally, I touch on access to nature—one of my favourite topics—on which the gracious Speech was also quiet, surprisingly given the importance of access to His Majesty and the challenges it presents in the context of large-scale residential development. I note the manifesto commitment to nine new national river walks. Can the Minister identify where they might be located or the process by which they will be selected? On access and environmental policy, I defer to the next generation. My daughter also had the privilege of attending yesterday's ceremony. In studying environmental science in the United States, she is reading Aldo Leopold's iconic *A Sand County Almanac*, which states:

"To build a road is so much simpler than to think of what the country really needs ... all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish".

I trust that His Majesty's Government will bear this in mind as we consider access to our dwindling wilderness while so energetically developing in a quest for economic growth.

3.11 pm

Baroness Scott of Needham Market (LD): My Lords, I join others in welcoming the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, to the Front Bench. I wish them and the Government well—and, my goodness, they will need it. The scale of the challenges facing this country is immense. They will require enormous unity of purpose between government at all levels, businesses of all sizes and civil society in all its forms. For many of us, the most troubling thing in recent years has been the creation of an increasingly divisive rhetoric that seeks to set groups against each other and achieves nothing at all. I trust that we will see an end to that.

I will focus on one particular area of housing—neighbourhood plans. As I do so, I keep in mind my noble friend the late Andrew Stunell, who is missed by many of us on these Benches and beyond. Neighbourhood planning was very much his brainchild. I declare an interest as president of the National Association of Local Councils. I also ought to say how much I appreciated the support of the noble Baronesses, Lady Hayman and Lady Taylor of Stevenage, during the passage of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act last year. They showed a real recognition of the role of town and parish councils, which was much appreciated by the sector. I look forward to their continued understanding and support, now that they are in government.

I turn to neighbourhood plans. As many noble Lords know, I am a huge advocate for the town and parish council sector. There are 10,000 of those councils and 100,000 unpaid councillors, who are operating at the heart of their communities and providing highly visible and accountable leadership. You cannot go out and take the dog for a walk without somebody stopping you and bending your ear about something. The role that they can play in the delivery of new housing is really important and probably not well understood. The neighbourhood planning system is a demonstrably proven way of delivering more housing by involving local communities in the number, type and style of new housing, as well as in realistic assessments of the services required to go alongside them, including green

spaces. We need to see local people as allies—not enemies—in the Government's mission to "get Britain building again", so I would appreciate a commitment that the Government will continue to ensure that local communities are involved, to some extent, in these decisions.

More than 1,000 areas—90% of which are led by parish and town councils—have now brought together their local communities to agree a neighbourhood plan, and many more are in development. According to the Commission on the Future of Localism,

"neighbourhood planning has been the most successful of the Localism Act's community rights, due to its mix of ... statutory weight and funded technical advice and support".

It has not been anti-growth. In fact, communities are choosing to allocate more housing than has been prescribed by their local planning authority. Independent research for the department under the last Government showed that, on average, 39 houses more per plan were created by neighbourhood plans than were set out by the planning authority. That came to 18,000 homes in 135 plans. Is that not the Harlech doctrine of having a few houses in many places? I am afraid that, quite often, the local planning authorities have a fixation on putting a lot of houses in a few places, which is the wrong way to think about it.

Separate research was carried out by O'Neill Homer. In its selected study areas, between 2012 and 2020 the target number of homes to be allocated was 37,000, but through neighbourhood planning 46,000 were allocated—a substantial uplift. As I said, that is a few houses in many places. In Deddington, Oxfordshire, the requirement was 45 homes but the neighbourhood plan chose to allocate 85 to 90. In Blandford, Dorset, there was a housing requirement of zero but the town chose to allocate 400. As well as supporting a higher number of homes to be built, each plan has passed a public referendum and there is local support for the allocations—a tacit agreement that the community agrees that these are the right homes in the right place and that, quite often, they are delivering new or improved infrastructure.

As well as the buy-in, another advantage of the sites allocated through neighbourhood planning is that they support smaller scales of development. That gives each development a smoother journey through the planning process, minimises delays and supports local small and medium-sized developers—a point made by the noble Lord, Lord Shipley. As part of their planning reforms, the Government should not only continue but enhance support for neighbourhood planning, enabling town and parish councils and neighbourhood planning groups right across the country to pursue housing growth and economic regeneration.

Areas without parish and town councils are missing out. Around two-thirds of England's population is not covered by a parish or town council, despite lots of independent research that shows that, across the piece, parished areas score significantly higher in key measures of community strength. It is really promising that more parish and town councils are being established—around 300 in the last decade—but it is quite slow and often in the face of opposition from the next tier up of the council. It would be very useful if the Government could have a look at some of the work that has been done, to see what can be done to speed that up. There

[BARONESS SCOTT OF NEEDHAM MARKET]

is a body of work that makes a powerful case for extending and expanding this hyperlocal level of governance—not least in housing, as I said. Having had a very positive relationship with the Minister while she was on the Opposition Front Bench, I hope that the sector can look forward to a fruitful relationship going forward.

3.18 pm

Lord Colgrain (Con): My Lords, I declare my farming interests in Kent as set out in the register. I will speak in the context of passages in the gracious Speech that refer to the environment, agriculture and net zero. However, before I do, I add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock. They were always well informed, passionate and reasonable when speaking in opposition, and I am sure that will continue now in government.

Prior to the calling of the general election, I was to have had the privilege of introducing to your Lordships' House the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill as brought from the other place. This Private Member's Bill would have included provisions to deliver a number of amendments to the 1953 Act to improve enforcement in response to incidents of livestock worrying by dogs. It would have had three effective clauses, all very much welcomed by the police. The first related to the seizure and detention of dogs, the second to the collection of samples and impressions, and the third to wider powers of entry. Given that that Bill had cross-party support in the Commons, may I urge the Minister to endeavour to support its reintroduction so that powers may be available to the police to obtain further evidence of an offence under Section 1 of the Act? This would also be broadly welcomed by the agricultural and rural community as a whole.

The second issue to which I wish to refer relates to championing British farming. As a previous member of your Lordships' Horticultural Sector Committee and, prior to that, the Rural Economy Committee, I have heard evidence aplenty that government promises of support to the sector have fallen short of expectations and even commitments. Now, the Government are talking about a target for half of all food production purchased across the public sector being produced locally. The recommendation from the horticulture Committee that there should be a dedicated appointment at Cabinet level for horticulture should be revived if there is any hope that this pledge will be fulfilled.

I also suggest that the Government should consider resurrecting farms at prisons. There used to be many of them, which, when they were present, were beneficial to inmates' mental and physical well-being, as testified by many prison governors, as well as helping to produce foodstuffs for the prison community itself and for local outlets. Perhaps the new Prisons Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Timpson, could address this excellent opportunity.

On the question of ELMS, its very slow introduction and rollout have tested the patience and the investment resolve of farmers, and it is just beginning to gain both credibility and support. This point has already been

most eloquently made by the noble Lord, Lord Curry of Kirkharle, and the noble Earl, Lord Devon. The last thing the rural community needs now is further change or tinkering of any sort with ELMS. The Minister herself is no doubt well aware of that and I am sure she would endorse it. So can she please encourage the Government not to fiddle?

My noble friend Lord Roborough referred to the Government's determination to halt the badger cull programme, which I know is an extremely emotive subject. This will dismay many farmers, who have seen its value at first hand in their TB-positive reactors numbers falling. It will also dismay those like me who see the incidents of positive TB reactors getting ever closer to their own livestock. While giving further thought to the whole TB question, can the Government say whether they have given any thought to the transmission of bovine TB through deer, given that the national deer herd is at its highest in living memory and deer are TB carriers?

On planning, as many noble Lords have mentioned there has always been disagreement between government of all hues and local residents, and it is not clear whether the Government's introduction of the term "grey belt" will be helpful in defining eligible property, and thus where planning authorisation may be forthcoming in the greenbelt. The current situation is even less clear for anyone living in a national park or in an area of outstanding natural beauty—I am concerned that no noble Lords have mentioned either of those in the debate so far today—where recent relaxation of planning regulations do not apply. So do the references to planning in the gracious Speech mean that the outstanding post-war achievement of maintaining virgin tracts of undeveloped land next to urban conurbations will now be jeopardised? How do the Government plan to reconcile their aims with the environmental lobbies, and how will the Prime Minister reconcile his mission-driven government ideology with the sharp rocks of nimbyism?

The third and last issue to which I refer borders on next Monday's debate on infrastructure and relates to the deadline set by the then Minister of State for Transport, issuing a ministerial Statement for the determination of the lower Thames crossing DCO application for 4 October. I will be bringing this to your Lordships' House as an Oral Question on Monday. As your Lordships will know, 90% of freight in the UK is moved by road. This project is key to unlocking UK economic growth by linking the UK's major ports in the south with those in the Midlands and the north.

The current Dartford Tunnel, the main north access on the M25 at present, is costing the UK £200 million in delays for repairs each year, and this will only get worse year on year. The whole project started in 2009, with consultations initiated in 2012, of which there have been eight to date with over 100,000 respondents. A final agreed route was announced in 2017. This project will generate a range of social and economic benefits for the local area and is forecast to add up to £40 billion to the UK economy. It is also a carbon pathfinder project for building infrastructure in a net-zero future and could help to build the net-zero skills and expertise that will allow the UK to become a world leader in low-carbon construction. Can the Minister

work with her colleagues in the Department for Transport to ensure that this application is approved as scheduled in October?

3.26 pm

Baroness Boycott (CB): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to be speaking in this first day of debate of this new Government. Like all noble Lords, I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, to their new jobs. We are in good hands.

There was so much to welcome in the gracious Speech, especially hearing that the Government recognise the climate crisis that we face and are taking legislation forward on improving water and our energy. This is a serious Government who will govern seriously. What a relief.

However, I have a few points. Chatham House says in a new report on the global food system that the primary driver of biodiversity is our global food system, which will continue to accelerate unless we change the way we produce food. Further destruction of our ecosystems and habitats will not just weaken our ability to grow food but increase emissions, as we continue to turn land into a carbon emitter rather than a carbon sink. We do not need to look far to see that, globally, subsidised systems support monocultures, deforestation and the use of chemicals, all of which weaken soils and destroy nature, while producing increasingly unhealthy foods that have led to diet-related illness becoming the number one cause of ill health and premature death across the world.

In the UK, we are doing better. In fact, the only benefit I can see from Brexit is that we have a new way of rewarding farmers. Instead of just a blanket payment for the amount of land that you own, that payment now goes to compensate farmers for their efforts and successes in restoring wildlife and nature. This is great stuff, and I hope that the new Government get to grips with many of the problems currently plaguing the system, as many Peers have mentioned.

However, when the Environment Act was originally debated, I argued, and I still remain of the view, that growing food sustainably is also of massive benefit to nature. I understand the arguments that growing wildflowers down a strip by a field does not make you actual money, whereas any food has a market price. Sustainable farming enhances the natural ability of soil to regenerate, to remain compact in the face of floods and to sequester carbon, as its roots systems and mycorrhizal fungi grow strongly underground. However, it can take time and money to transition, which is why too many farmers are still nervous about doing it and so continue to farm in old-fashioned ways. Can the Government help with this transition, especially if we now have a goal of 50% of our food being grown here. We want it grown properly.

Just as challenging in the years to come will be not just what we eat but where we grow it. As the world warms and places from which we now routinely import food start to get too hot or too dry, we must look at our own food security and using our own land more efficiently. So I am a little concerned about the mention of a Bill on “sustainable aviation fuel”. Although

some if this might be needed, and knowing that this is in response to previous recommendations by the CCC, I hope that as part of the debates we can have a serious conversation about aviation demand, because another CCC recommendation is an end to all airport expansion.

The CCC said just today in its progress report that, while emissions fell due to the pandemic—not surprising as we could not go anywhere—

“demand continues to grow quickly, presenting a risk that it may increase beyond pre-pandemic levels in the next year”.

It is clear that it cannot be left to grow exponentially; this risks putting land in direct competition. It also raises the issue of fairness: financing ought not to come from general taxation. Those who pollute—those who choose to fly the most—should pay.

Tom Heap, the producer of “39 Ways to Save the Planet” on Radio 4, as well as being a regular “Countryfile” presenter, has been working on this. He told me the other day that, if one wanted to run the current aviation industry on biofuels, it would require the annual harvest of a forest five times the size of Egypt every year.

To illustrate quite how inefficient some of these fuels are in terms of land use, biodiesel, which comes from rapeseed oil, requires 884 square metres to produce a megawatt hour of energy, whereas concentrating solar photovoltaic panels demand only 22 square metres when installed on towers, 19 when installed on the ground and three when on roofs. Even the much-hyped miscanthus, which at least has the benefit of regrowing after we chop it down, produces only 158 megawatt hours for every 158 square metres. It is important to remember that all these crops are monocrops; they do not encourage biodiversity. The CEO of Rolls-Royce told Sky News recently that the creation of liquid hydrocarbon fuel from biofuels was impossible to scale, due to its extraordinary land-take and the huge biodiversity challenge.

By contrast, solar or wind—I strongly welcome the end of the de facto onshore wind ban—are very good users of land. New energy generators can make the land provide not one service but two or three. Animals can graze near solar panels and around wind turbines, biodiversity can flourish and horticulture can happen. It need not be one or the other; in fact, it must cease to be one or the other. I urge the Government to stop looking at this wasteful use of our money and look at using land in a much more creative way.

I happened to bump into our new Science Minister, the wonderful noble Lord, Lord Vallance, in the Lobby this morning, when he was coming in. I voiced my concerns about aviation fuel and he said, “New technologies are on the way”. I would be glad to think that but, for very long, we have thought that technology will always get us out of the mess we are in. How about also considering flying less, frequent fliers paying more and public transport stepping up several gears to get us to, say, Edinburgh?

Finally, I turn to an area that was not specifically mentioned in the Speech: community energy. This sector has been somewhat strangled by government policies lately but, last year, I tabled two amendments to the now Energy Act, which were supported across this House and in another place—in fact, we passed them here twice—which would have unlocked the

[BARONESS BOYCOTT]

barriers that the sector currently faces. They were supported by the Labour Front Bench and the now Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero went so far as to table similarly worded amendments, so I am super hopeful that progress can be made here.

In my time serving on the Environment and Climate Change Committee we looked at how well we were encouraging people to change from traditional boilers to heat pumps and ground source heating. It seemed completely ridiculous that the Government were not actively encouraging, say, a group of households living in a terrace, as lots of us do, to pool their individual grants and, between them, create a single, affordable source to which everybody was connected. It seems easy to do, so I hope the Government will.

3.33 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott. I think I agree with everything that she said, but particularly the points about our broken food system. I welcome the noble Lord and noble Baroness to the Front Bench. I have worked with both extensively on these issues and others—in the case of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, particularly on health—in the previous Parliament. I hope that we will continue to do so on these issues, which in essence are about not politics but the physics and biology of this damaged planet and islands, and the unhealthy conditions that they are creating for our people and the world's people—the One Health perspective that recognises that our health and economy are entirely dependent on our environment.

Like the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and the noble Earl, Lord Devon, I will take a moment to talk about constitutional issues, since we two Green Peers had to choose just two of six days, which is a reflection of the urgent need to see more Green representatives in your Lordships' House. After all, we two current Greens have 1,931,880 voters to represent—or at least around 90% of those voters, since there are 40 Green MPs missing from the other place, who would be there if the number of votes matched the number of seats.

When we think about the constitution, it is not a question of whether people are doing the best with what they have but rather, as Danny Sriskandarajah, author of the new book, *Power to the People*, is asking: is this really the best we can do in terms of structures? Clearly it is not. We have multiple environmental crises but also, as the author says, an apparent “crisis of imagination” in thinking that we cannot change the deeply dysfunctional political, economic, social and environmental systems that we have now.

Constitutional change is not an issue just for the Green Party: it is in all our interests—the national interest. It is crucial to the future of our country. Double the number of people who voted for the Labour Party stayed at home. This is the 34% Government. With that in mind, I ask the Ministers about something unlikely to be included in the King's Speech but crucial for starting to build public engagement with environmental and other decision-making. Do they plan to build on the tentative experiments in participative grass-roots democracy—people's assemblies—that began under the former party of government?

I turn to the specific issues of energy, environment and housing. The Green Party embraces and commends many of the steps that the Government are taking, particularly on energy. The rooftop solar revolution is long overdue, and the release of the potential of onshore wind is a reversing of a decision that was one of the worst ideologically driven missteps of the last few Governments. But I would be interested to hear what plans the Government have to ensure that this is accompanied by home batteries and electric cars, which, through vehicle-to-grid systems, have the potential to support the stability of the grid and reduce the need for further generation. I point the Minister to the recently published results of a trial in Canberra of that approach.

The Minister referred to updating the community benefits protocol for renewable energy installations, but what about encouraging community ownership of energy schemes?

The biggest gap in energy policy is a failure to engage with the reality that the cleanest, greenest, cheapest energy that you can have is the energy that you do not need to use. Where are the plans for the massive upgrading of the housing stock that is essential to tackling both the cost of living crisis and the climate emergency?

Further on housing, during the election the Green Party talked about “Right Homes, Right Place, Right Price”, and we will continue to do so. It is pleasing to hear the Minister speaking about insisting that housing developments are accompanied by the essential provision of doctors, schools and public transport, but the handful of oligarchic housebuilders on which the Government seem to intend to rely for housing provision have a track record of failing to deliver even the promised facilities. We have the same problem here as with sewage, which I will get to. These companies' *raison d'être* is to make maximum profit, and that often does not correspond with building houses but rather with not building them.

I heard some expressions of support from this side of the Chamber when the Minister referred to imposing housing allocations on local areas and local governments. But this reflects one of the chief intellectual fault lines of the King's Speech: the Government talk at least about a far more constructive level of engagement in working with the nations and councils of these islands but then are seeking to prevent them making decisions in the best interests, and according to the will, of their communities.

I turn back to sewage. If you look up mentions of the word in your Lordships' House this century, you find that there has been a total of 768, heavily concentrated in the last two years. I am sure the whole of your Lordships' House would acknowledge the leadership the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, has provided in this area, as he did again today, noting that the private companies that own our water systems are causing “appalling damage”. I think the whole House would concur with that, but I very much doubt that the Government's measures as in the King's Speech are sufficient. Water companies and their bosses exist to make profits; that is their statutory duty. Until we bring this essential public service—this monopoly—back into public hands to be run for public good, the incentive to cut corners, dodge regulation and pollute will continue.

I have not the time now to cover the other multiple environmental challenges that I will be raising through other mechanisms in coming days, but I will tick off a couple of points. I very much agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, about the urgent need for the long-promised land use strategy; with the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, about the need for more support for farmers and the central place of food security in securing our future; and with the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, about the need for a zero-waste economy, something on which UK policy lags far behind many of our European neighbours, particularly in consumer sectors. Big food and big business wrestled again and again with the previous Government on these issues and won; I hope we will see the new Government acting differently and standing up to big food and big business.

Finally, we are told that the number one mission of the Government is growth, yet we cannot have infinite growth on a finite planet. We have an ageing population, an ill population, and a society in which lifelong learning provision has been trashed and young people loaded with unpayable student debt, while our universities have been left in a perilous financial position. The Minister talked about creating skilled jobs, but we are yet to hear at all from the Government—I acknowledge it is early days—about creating the skills and understanding we urgently need to tackle our polycrises, which are particularly but not solely environmental. I note that figures out today show a second annual fall in the number of students applying to universities.

I ask the Government to think about their definition of skills. We remember, as the Covid report comes out today, how suddenly, at the height of the pandemic, we realised that many of the low-paid, underrespected individuals in our society were essential workers, and that every job that needs doing—from sewer cleaners to school dinner servers to bus drivers—needs to be both decently paid and treated with respect. Every person has a contribution to make to repairing this broken Britain—our environment, our economy, our infrastructure and our society.

3.42 pm

Lord Rooker (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, on his maiden speech, much of which I agreed with. I also congratulate my noble friends on their appointment to government. I am particularly pleased to see my noble friend Lady Smith of Malvern in the Chamber today—the first time anybody has said those words here. I have heard all the speeches, and I warn my noble friends the Ministers that the one they need to examine in some considerable detail is that of the noble Lord, Lord Curry. I will not go into further detail, but in my view it bears great examination.

This is where I will lose the House. We have so much spare land in England that the brave action would be to suspend planning controls for 30 months and use building control. Both Brindleyplace in Birmingham and London Docklands were built under such a regime. Both were brownfield, which, while being a priority, is more expensive due to remediation. We need to use the lessons of things that have worked.

The last Labour Government made at least two attempts to reform planning in the interests of development. We failed. Before the 2001 election, Ministers were sent out and about on one day to show that Britain was open after foot and mouth. On the day in question, I visited various venues in Hertfordshire and reported in on some modest, sensible planning issues. I was at DSS at the time, and received a very poor response from the fellow Minister, so I complained. The upshot was that, by October 2001—by which time I was in this House and at the Home Office—I received a response from the then Planning Minister, my noble and learned friend Lord Falconer. He made some positive signals and promised to “change the culture”. By 2002, I was the Planning Minister, and by late 2003, someone else was the Planning Minister. That is not the way to change the culture.

What land are we talking about? As at March 2022, 35.4% of England was either national parks, green belt or areas of outstanding natural beauty. Only 10% was developed, and half of that was for transport and utilities. Residential is tiny, at less than 2%. I have heard today the phrase vast housing estates—it is less than 2%. To get growth in housing and communities—and I emphasise the second point—we need to increase the developed area by a little over 1% to around 10%. These figures are from *Land Use Statistics: England 2022*. The fuss is about where to build. Unless we go for new towns and cities, it makes sense to grow existing settlements for residential and community use. This is where the emotion about the green belt comes in, which is generally the collar around conurbations. A lot of the immediate collar is rubbish land, ripe for development. We can easily, and should, protect the vast areas of pleasant country, but experience shows that it will not happen without active ministerial action, supported from the very top—and I mean the very top. It is crucial that it comes from the top.

In my view, Ministers cannot be neutral on growth and planning. It has never been considered politically sexy, which is why the culture change has failed. True, by 2006, the now Dame Kate Barker had been called in; she suggested getting more certainty and less discretion in order to reduce delays in the system. Regional and local builders, especially the smaller ones, have virtually been wiped out due to planning not being rules-based. Brave developers, such as Urban Splash with its innovation, reuse of existing structures and modern methods, have contributed, but the scale has been nowhere near what is needed.

We need to look at some other sacred areas. During the evidence sessions for the recent Lords Economic Affairs Committee's inquiry into missing workers after Covid, we were given two examples of the planning culture holding us back. Evidence was given regarding the south-west and the Lake District about the lack of housing for local workers and those coming in to work in hospitality being the cause of the lack of growth. These areas are magnets for international visitors, and hospitality and tourism are a key aspect of the economy in those areas. I briefly declare an interest: for 37 years I have owned a week's timeshare in the Lake District, and I have seen some of the changes and difficulties. Planning is the single large reason for lack of growth, due to too much discretion leading to uncertainty.

[LORD ROOKER]

Business needs sure knowledge to grow, so the recruitment of staff can be achieved. Some of this will be in the national parks but, as I have said, the numbers involved are tiny and yet the job growth potential for local people is massive. It stops them being driven away.

We have the oldest housing stock in Europe. Average homes in England are required under present figures for demolition and new build to last literally hundreds of years. Some of it should be removed, but much could be improved from an energy and housing quality view. But it needs a plan driven by Ministers, similar to the sustainable communities plan published by Lord Prescott in 2003. We just lost our way. It was a brilliant exercise in planning for communities, but it was never really fulfilled.

Then there are questions of density levels, practical issues such as power points at 1 metre, and design quality, as advocated by the late Lord Rogers on the Bill in 2004. Habitable rooms should not be allowed to be on ground floors in flood-plain areas. There should be a requirement to grow the green belt. The last Labour Government left more green belt than they inherited, but changes were made. Local authorities cannot do this without leadership and partnership from Government.

I shall repeat the figures because of the nonsense. We see headlines about “concreting over our green and pleasant land” but residential is 2% while developed land in England is 10%, half of which is utilities and transport, so we are not talking about concreting over the country. For a little over 1%, all the growth that we need for housing and development can easily be achieved. We have to cut out some of the nonsense that scares people off. Nobody needs to concrete over anywhere; we can achieve the growth easily.

3.50 pm

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, I too welcome the new Ministers to their roles and congratulate my noble friend Lord Fuller on his maiden speech.

I am moved to speak in this debate because, while this agenda has the ability to improve the world, if not carried out with sensitivity and balance then it also has the ability to create terrible harm. There are no simple answers to all this but “Do no harm” has to be the first principle. There is so much to cover and I am mindful of the time limit, so I hope noble Lords will forgive me for highlighting a number of points that I would have liked to have gone into in more detail. I hope they will also forgive me for the fact that by this stage of the debate some of these points have already been raised.

It does not bode well that “agriculture” is missing from the principal topics of this debate. Agriculture has always played an important part in the life of this country, and surely the impact of the Ukraine conflict has demonstrated that it is prudent to produce as much of our own food as possible. Currently we import around 40%. Travelled food is bad for the environment. Growing our own has the benefit of food security, a lower carbon footprint and supply-chain resilience, as well as supporting local businesses and biodiversity. It is a no-brainer.

We need to support our farmers, as others have said. As Jeremy Clarkson has illustrated, farming is not an easy profession. We must ensure that the post-Brexit subsidies work and that farmers are able to make a reasonable living. It is not an easy profession to enter and you cannot switch farming on and off, but it is vital for this country's food.

We are lucky to live in a country with truly beautiful countryside. We are the custodians of the countryside for future generations and, while I know the noble Lord, Lord Rooker, will not like this statement, once it is concreted over we will never get it back. In the pursuit of a quick fix on housing numbers, please do not be tempted to tamper with the green belt, because it is there for a purpose.

Our countryside provides jobs, tourism and a way of life that we need to look after. As we have already heard, green spaces positively affect mental health and well-being. While we all understand the pressing importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, there are enormous risks associated with moving to a system based too much on electricity that a more diverse energy mix can mitigate. Overreliance on electricity exposes the country to geopolitical risks and supply-chain disruptions, making us very vulnerable. Of course we need energy from renewable sources but currently they are intermittent, leading to inconsistent supply. To create large-scale battery storage requires mining significant resources, including rare earth materials, which has negative environmental and geopolitical implications in turn.

I am afraid I was disappointed by the announcement of 7,000 acres of solar farm in Suffolk because not only are solar farms unsightly but they take up significant space, adversely affecting ecosystems and, in this case, taking land out of food production. Solar first needs to be put on roofs. The Government say they are going to treble solar production, but what assessment have they made of how much can be placed on buildings already in situ?

Wind farms also need to be carefully placed. They are visually intrusive, diminish natural beauty and can cause habitat destruction. Their noise impacts on quality of life, as well as posing a threat to birdlife and bats. All this leads to our putting wind farms offshore wherever possible.

When debating climate change, we talk a lot about cows and cars. However, we need to be honest: we never talk about construction. Steel and concrete are major causes of climate change so, first, we need to stop unnecessary construction. There is much redevelopment that does not need to happen, with buildings torn down needlessly instead of being repurposed—the lovely art deco M&S building in Oxford Street, for example. We can all have some responsibility for this. In the way that we have all got on board with recycling, we need to get on board with considering the carbon cost of our own housing developments and refurbishments.

Many areas now experience seasonal water shortages, as other noble Lords have brought up. Will the Minister insist that every new building has a provision to collect and store storm-water and recycle in grey-water systems, as is done in other countries?

We all recognise that there is a need for more housing, but can we pause for a moment and consider some of the causes for that shortage? Population

increase contributes to the problem. I know that this is an emotive issue but last year over 700,000 people, who will need roughly a quarter of a million houses, came to this country. At the other end of the scale, much of the residential property in central London is owned by wealthy foreigners, pushing prices well beyond the reach of most British people and, in effect, doughnutting our capital city of our settled population. No wonder there is such a housing crisis, especially in the south-east and London.

Surely what we need to build is beautiful, sustainable housing that people will look at in 200 years' time and think it attractive. Most of what has been built this century has been low-quality and badly designed. Unsightly housing can create visual pollution, negatively impacting communities and does not always last. Meanwhile, the developers make huge amounts of money out of it. Housing should not be left solely in the hands of the developers or the planners who will be working to meet targets. Will the Minister support the idea of an expert adviser to ensure that design and suitability is important?

We need to listen to and work with local communities, and build homes with local materials in styles that will blend in and enhance the neighbourhood, fitting smaller developments into towns and villages in a way that creates cohesion and enhances communities. As others will have read in the briefing, experience already shows us that a reliance on new towns often underdelivers. Development needs to meet true tests of local need, and accusing people of nimbyism simply creates conflict. Ensuring that local communities are involved from the early stages is vital to bring them with you. We need to ensure that development has strong environmental requirements, takes into account good aesthetic design and has the supporting infrastructure required to ensure a seamless, functional fit while not creating more problems down the line.

Food security and energy security are integral in helping to secure our national security. We must look at the causes as well as the effects that we are seeking to address. We need to support our farming community and work with local communities to develop neighbourhoods that will be cherished for many generations to come, not just box-tick targets.

3.58 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the new Government on their very handsome general election victory. I also congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on her government position and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, on his new portfolio. He was a dark horse in that I knew little of the force of his convictions on the crucial issue of climate change that afflicts our planet. I hoped to learn more today, as I believe I have. Nevertheless, questions remain about whether he is truly prepared to put his shoulder to the wheel and deliver the transformative changes needed on so many fronts in the short time remaining to us, it being often repeated that this is the last decade in which decisive action can save the planet. I give him the benefit of the doubt. However, much rests on the shoulders of this Government. We on this side of the House will do our best to hold their feet to the fire to meet the challenges of climate change and nature across all sectors.

I also express my commiserations to the Conservative Benches, but I rather suspect that some of them view the result of the general election with relief, in that they can now sort out their internal differences outside the full glare of government. I hope they do so with speed, because this momentous issue needs an Opposition who speak with one voice. The country deserves to know whether they believe in the speedy transformative changes needed, or whether the deniers and delayers within their party will win the day.

I start my contribution to this new Parliament with a few thoughts on the severity of the threat we face from climate change and its provenance, because therein lies the answer. In my view, climate change is an existential crisis. There is no denying its cause: the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere started with the Industrial Revolution, led by Britain, a mere 170 years or so ago.

The rapid release of long-buried carbon through the burning of fossil fuels has violently disrupted the balance of carbon flows between rocks and soil, the oceans and our atmosphere. The fact is that when we humans burn these fuels, vast amounts of carbon dioxide are released back into the atmosphere. This excess carbon changes our climate, increasing global temperatures, causing ocean acidification and disrupting the planet's ecosystems and weather patterns. The devastation wrought on our planet's natural balance system is everywhere for us to witness.

At the same time as we witness extreme weather events and natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, we watch the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere go up and up. *National Geographic* tells us that, on 9 May in 2013, the Mauna Loa Observatory recorded a long-awaited climate milestone: the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceeded 400 parts per million for the first time in 55 years of measurement, and probably for the first time in more than 3 million years of earth's history. The last time the concentration of earth's main greenhouse gas reached this mark, the seas were at least 9.1 metres—around 30 feet—higher. That is a level that would today inundate major cities around the world.

But here is the thing—then, carbon dioxide concentrations were on their way down. Today, we are in a very different scenario, because 400 parts per million is a mere milestone on a rapid uphill climb into uncharted territory. Until the 20th century, concentrations of carbon dioxide had not exceeded 300 parts per million, let alone 400 parts per million, for at least 800,000 years. That is how far back scientists have been able to measure carbon dioxide directly in bubbles of ancient air trapped in Antarctic ice cores. However, last month, in June 2024, the measured concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was 427 parts per million. That should give us all pause for thought.

It is important to have this information recorded in *Hansard* because we know what we will do if we continue with business as usual, and as the world continues to burn fossil fuels at an increasing pace. The tragic fact is that global carbon dioxide emissions rose again in 2023, reaching record levels.

I believe this Government get it. Their manifesto spoke about tackling the nonsensical position in which we find ourselves regarding our dependence on energy

[BARONESS SHEEHAN]

sources from unstable regions in an uncertain world, which not just endangers our energy security but saddles our nation with unsustainable energy prices, all the while exacerbating the climate crisis.

I welcome the Government's Great British Energy Bill to boost investment in clean power, but will the Minister tell us why the energy independence Bill has been shelved? There are other notable omissions from the King's Speech, but I shall restrict my remarks to this sector. The Great British Energy Bill does not tackle the imbalance in the energy sector enjoyed by fossil fuel producers. There are a number of inequities in favour of the fossil fuel industry. One is MER—maximising economic recovery of oil and gas in the UK continental shelf; another is the subsidies and support enjoyed historically by the sector from various Governments. Yet another is the artificially high price of electricity.

When can we expect the Government's priorities to turn to these matters? After all, the Labour manifesto undertook to implement the UK's G7 pledge to end fossil fuel subsidies. When can we expect that to happen? Labour's manifesto states:

"We will not issue new licences to explore new fields because they will not take a penny off bills, cannot make us energy secure, and will only accelerate the worsening climate crisis. In addition, we will not grant new coal licences and will ban fracking for good".

These are fine words, which I welcome, but where is the legislation to follow through with this critical action? When can we expect news on what the Government intend to do to decouple electricity prices from the wholesale gas price? In March last year, the *Guardian* reported, based on research commissioned by the Liberal Democrats, that the UK Government had

"given £20bn more in support to fossil fuel producers than those of renewables since 2015".

Can the Minister promise that such articles will now be a thing of the past?

That old adage, "Where there's muck there's brass" holds true today in the fight against climate change. While there are profits still to be made in fossil fuels, unscrupulous people will reap those benefits, and they have shown that they do not care how mucky they get. They must be made aware that their time is up. We must turn off the tap and stop adding ever more carbon into our atmosphere, or future generations will never forgive us.

4.07 pm

Lord Ashcombe (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to welcome the noble Baroness and the noble Lord to the Front Bench. Like many others, I wish them well. I too shall speak to the energy industry and its mix in this country, in particular oil and gas. I declare my interest as an insurance broker for Marsh Ltd, in the energy practice.

Without energy in the economy, the country would grind to an abrupt halt. Today, the United Kingdom derives approximately 20% of its energy from electricity and 75% from hydrocarbons, with the expectation that this number will reduce to 25% when we meet the 2050 target for net zero, which I believe everyone wants to achieve.

Currently, wind, solar and nuclear power do not produce enough energy for 100% totally renewable electricity generation. The split of electricity generation last year was as follows: wind 32%; solar a modest 5%; hydrocarbons 30%, of which almost all was gas; nuclear 14.5%, the very best baseload we have; and other sources, including interconnector cables with Europe, some 21%. The mix will remain important for security purposes.

I ask noble Lords to please remember that the sun does not always shine and the wind does not always blow—sometimes at the same time—which leaves a large shortage that currently can be made up only through predominantly gas generation. This shows that the United Kingdom's energy security remains important. The more we can produce domestically the better, and we should not be reliant on more imports than are necessary.

Energy is greater than just electricity generation. On the world scale, UK emissions are about 1%. Oil and gas emissions in this country are currently about 3% of that number and have been reduced by 24% since 2018. We are on track for targets of 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050 for that which we produce. This is by no means perfect: the UK is still in the top 20 countries for emissions.

We use the majority of our domestic gas to generate electricity and heat homes, but we still need to import about 50% of our requirements. This comes by pipeline from Europe, predominantly Norway, and is then topped up by importing LNG as needed. LNG is emissions-heavy in comparison to domestic production, due to the manufacturing process and the need for it to be transported significant distances. We already import the majority of the crude oil refined here. The refineries are not compatible with North Sea oil, which we export predominantly to Europe, then reimporting the refined product primarily for transport. The emissions caused by more importation than necessary would be more detrimental to the atmosphere and should be avoided.

The oil and gas industry employs some 200,000 people directly or indirectly, according to OEUK, and produces substantial revenue for this country. The temptation to significantly reduce any future activity in our oil hydrocarbon basins would have a harmful effect on these employees and would quite possibly lead to an exodus of highly qualified individuals, who would look to use their skills overseas. This was the experience in New Zealand when the issuing of new licences slowed significantly. It is now in the process of trying to reverse this trend and potentially issue more licences.

We need to provide an environment where we can use the skills in this country as we manage the provision of energy in the future: offshore wind, hydrogen and carbon sequestration, as the noble Baroness, Lady Liddell of Coatdyke, so beautifully described. The increase in offshore wind power—of which I am an advocate, as we have one of the best resources in the world in this respect—is the best use of these transferable skills across industries. However, onshore wind and solar farms will use significant amounts of land, which has to be taken out of agricultural production. The areas required are frightening, and the Minister specifically addressed the protection of the environment.

Nothing is ever simple, and the increase in power generation has a drawback: the grid is straining to provide sufficient capacity to move the electricity required from production sites to areas of use. Many of the oil and gas producers are also investors in the renewables sector. However, they need stability in their cost base in order to continue to produce oil and gas to fund the renewable growth, all to the long-term benefit of this country. The projects that generate the returns for taxpayers carry significant costs, and changes in any cost structure, including investment allowances, can play havoc with their continuation and may make projects unviable. There is still a significant amount of oil and gas to be found and developed in our waters, so let us continue to be an oil-producing and gas-producing nation well into the future while keeping, importantly, to our net-zero commitments.

Greater taxation of domestic oil and gas, or any reduction in the granting of licences, will make it less likely that this production will continue, resulting in a drop in revenues to the Exchequer and in a potential exodus of talents and skills. This will reduce our energy security. Given that, during the transition to net zero and afterwards, the United Kingdom will continue to need hydrocarbons, a further consequence would effectively be outsourcing our environmental responsibilities and commitments to countries that may well have lower levels of green regulation than us, ironically resulting in a net increase in global emissions.

4.13 pm

Lord Carrington (CB): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock. I also welcome a great deal of what was in the gracious Speech.

I will concentrate on a couple of things: the renters' rights Bill and farming in the countryside. I therefore declare my interests in the private rented sector and farming as set out in the register.

On the reform of the private rental sector, I have always condemned the improper use of Section 21 and have urged early improvement of Section 8 to enable justified evictions to take place. I look forward to hearing the Government's position on this, as so much depends on getting the correct balance between the rights of renters and those of the landlord, or the supply of rental accommodation will be adversely affected and rental costs could rise.

I also hope that the previous idea of making all tenancies assured periodic tenancies is being reconsidered, as with the abolition of Section 21 there is no need to abolish fixed-term tenancies or assured shorthold tenancies. A fixed term agreed between two consenting parties excludes early repossession except in the case of non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour. There is a clear demand from some renters for a specified rental period. That is also in the interests of landlords, who can avoid the costly turnover of tenants. For tenants and landlords, there is the opportunity to negotiate favourable terms.

Since the late 1980s, ASTs have worked very well for most tenants and landlords, as can be seen from the figures. The average tenancy length in the last

English Housing Survey is 4.3 years, so allowing tenants to fix a longer period that suits them is in their best interests—surely a vote of confidence in the system.

Another concern that needs to be taken into account in the Bill is the housing of agricultural and other workers in the rural context, where housing, and particularly affordable housing, may be in short supply. Access to affordable accommodation is a key part of rural employment, and we should remember that 85% of rural businesses are not farming or forestry. We need to consider the various grounds for possession of houses and flats that have been occupied by service workers who have retired or have left employment and where there is a clear requirement for the new occupant to have that accommodation for the better performance of their duties, whether it be agricultural worker, security personnel, teacher, nurse, policeman, warden or forester.

I also welcome the commitment to introduce a new decent homes standard to the private rental sector. Similarly, I look forward to the introduction of new minimum energy-efficiency standards and the associated reform of energy performance certificates, as the current rules are not fit for purpose, particularly in the case of older buildings and many rural buildings.

Turning to farming and the countryside, I welcome the new team at Defra and acknowledge their extremely supportive voices that have already been heard at the Yorkshire show and other locations. Like many others, I regret that farming did not feature in the gracious Speech, but despite the fears of the noble Earl, Lord Devon, the noble Lord, Lord Colgrain, and no doubt many others, I have today hosted on behalf of the NFU a meeting at which the Farming Minister, Daniel Zeichner, went through what the Government were up to on farming. I can assure everybody that ELMS, SFIs, badgers, mental health, rural crime, trade and the uplands were all mentioned, so I think we can rest considerably assured by that.

On the proposed planning reforms, I join others in calling on the Government to update the National Planning Policy Framework to include a weighted argument in favour of food production, with the benefits of farming clearly recognised by the planning system to support food production across England. A recent survey found that 84% think that food production targets are as important or more important than environmental targets for farming. This leads to the proposed land use framework, which we have heard about and of which I am greatly in favour, as long as sufficient flexibility is built in to deal with changing circumstances, whether from climate change or disease.

It is clear that good arable land should not be covered in solar panels, but somehow we need to accommodate energy, biodiversity net gain and water, so a real and informed debate must take place on the right balance between agri-environment and food production. I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Curry, for all the work that he has done in this sector, and let us hope that we can build on it.

At a more detailed level, it would be good to see greater flexibility in planning approval for on-farm reservoirs and slurry stores as well as wider farm diversification projects. In the rural context, planning

[LORD CARRINGTON]

permissions for affordable housing need to be speeded up to help our rural communities to attract more jobs and grow the rural economy. Although the recruitment of 300 planning officers is helpful, I suggest that a faster solution would be to delegate simple and less political planning applications to qualified private sector companies, as is the case with building controls. I would be most interested to hear Ministers' views on this.

On energy, in the situation where farmers occupy some 70% of all land, local authorities should recognise that ground-mounted solar and small-scale on-site wind generation can help farm businesses to become more sustainable and viable. Permitted development rights for wind generation should be expanded to allow farmers to become self-sufficient in energy all year round. Also, farmers, landowners and other operators need faster and affordable access to rural electricity grid connections.

I end with a final plea on the farming side. If we are to deliver our farming and agri-environmental priorities, the Government need not only to maintain but to increase the multi-year agricultural budget for the duration of this Parliament. Andersons, the independent consultant, has calculated that the public funding needed to deliver statutory environment, climate and policy ambitions in England in this Parliament is an annual agricultural budget of around £4 billion. That is not just money for farmers; it is funding that will give farmers the confidence to invest for the future and help to make possible the Government's aims on sustainable food production, food security, environment and net zero.

4.22 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the humble Address, and I take the opportunity to congratulate the incoming Government and to welcome the Ministers to their new positions. I also add my congratulations to my noble friend on his maiden speech.

I declare my interests as honorary president of National Energy Action, honorary vice-president of Association of Drainage Authorities, and honorary associate of the British Veterinary Association. I co-authored a number of reports on bricks and water with the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum, and on rural housing from the Rural Economy Research Group. I would like to share these with the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for her greater enjoyment and education in her new role.

In exploring the impact of housebuilding and energy proposals for more onshore wind farms, I urge a degree of caution. I pay tribute to the late Professor Mike O'Carroll, who set up REVOLT—Rural England Versus Overhead Line Transmission—opposing the erection of pylons in the north of England.

As a newly elected MP for the Vale of York in 1997—I was elected on the same day as the newly installed noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Malvern—I was faced with Labour's plan to build a second line of pylons down the spine of the constituency, transporting electricity all the way from Middlesbrough, across North Yorkshire to the south, through the national grid to serve the south of England. This attracted public outrage.

At the very least, these power lines should be placed underground. Alternatively, electricity generated from renewables should serve those closest to the source of the power generated. That includes energy from waste, on which this Government have so far remained silent. Will the Government commit to new energy from waste plants, again to serve the local community with a sustainable source of energy, but also disposing of household waste that might otherwise go to landfill? We should aim to use energy where it is created to the benefit of the local community.

In addition, between 3% and 7% of energy is lost in overhead line transmission. It is vulnerable to extreme weather. During Storm Arwen, for example, power was lost in the north-east of England and North Yorkshire for up to nine days. Will the Government be minded to revise the National Planning Policy Framework and planning practice guidance to ensure joined-up planning applications so that planning for offshore and onshore wind farms include the siting of substations as part of the original planning application?

Labour has rightly prioritised cleaning up the rivers and waterways of sewage, but the problem of sewage in rivers and sea starts with the mass building of four and five-bedroom houses in inappropriate places, pushing four or five times the amount of sewage into inadequate water pipes. Will the Government make an early pledge to end the automatic right to connect, promised since Sir Michael Pitt's review after the 2007 floods? Will the Government commit today to implementing Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010? Equally, will they introduce mandatory sustainable drainage systems for all new housing developments? That is a single measure that would help to prevent sewage overflow into the combined sewers and, from there, into our rivers and seas.

Defra must make water companies statutory consultees in the planning application process, particularly where it is impossible to connect safely to existing pipes, which are often antiquated and from the Victorian era. Planning applications must take into account that they cannot simply fit and must ensure that the developers pay for the connections.

What is the position of the Government on building on functional flood plains? Labour, in opposition, supported the amendment in my name and that of the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, to the then Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to prevent building on functional flood plains. Will the Government now honour that commitment? In particular, will they provide resources to local authorities to undertake the essential mapping exercise to establish which zones fall under zone 3b so as to exclude them from major developments, which is so essential to prevent future flooding?

There are specific needs for housing in rural areas, as specified by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans. In particular, there is a crying need for one or two-bedroom homes that are affordable. We have identified initiatives such as rural exception and making a planning passport for all exception sites, which would help to remedy this.

The Government have pledged to grow the economy through reforming the planning system, but they must never lose sight of the fact that an Englishman's home is his castle, nor that it is local planning authorities

that are best placed to take planning decisions. The British public will not take kindly to housing developments built on areas prone to flooding, nor to having unsightly overhead power lines and pylons built alongside their houses. If the energy generated was used close to the source of supply, the need for overhead line transmission would be removed.

Now, we have to eat. I applaud all our farmers do to put food on our table. I pay tribute to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services, of which I am a patron, RABI and FCN. These charities support farmers in the difficult times we face currently. I make a plea to the new Government to give farmers certainty to ensure that food security and self-sufficiency in production at home ensure a safe and affordable supply of food. Large rafts of land should not be lost to rewilding, solar energy production and tree planting. The role of farming in bringing environmental benefits, such as the sequestration and storage of carbon, should be recognised, celebrated and encouraged. Giving those farms currently in higher-level stewardship agreements the right to exit the old schemes early, to move to a Countryside Stewardship agreement in the next few months, would greatly assist them in this period of transition, with the rapid reduction in basic farm payments.

I urge the new Government to support our farmers in exporting their goods by creating export opportunities in Europe and further afield. I applaud the introduction by the last Government of agricultural attachés, who worked effectively to promote our food and farming exports. I would welcome the negotiation by the Government of a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement with our European neighbours, which I believe is more appropriate than the negotiation of a veterinary agreement. The incoming Government must strive to ensure that any food imported into the UK meets the same high standard of animal health, animal welfare and environment as food produced here.

Farm tenancy agreements are in urgent need of reform, and I urge the Government to tackle this as a priority. Fifty per cent of farms in the North Yorkshire and County Durham are tenanted, and these tenant farmers deserve certainty and access to funds through LMS.

Finally, will the Government take the opportunity of the debate today to ensure a vibrant future for our rural communities across Britain, with a strong and sustainable farming sector and housing which is fit and affordable for those starting out on their career, as well as for those nearer their retirement?

4.32 pm

Lord Ravensdale (CB): My Lords, like others, I very much welcome the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, to their roles. I very much enjoyed working with them both in the last Parliaments and look forward to continuing to do so. First, I declare my interests. I am a chief engineer working for AtkinsRéalis in the energy sector, a director of Peers for the Planet and co-chair of Legislators for Nuclear.

In the gracious Speech and in the Minister's opening remarks, I was very pleased to see the level of ambition from the new Government in the energy sector and

the targets in place, particularly the 2030 target for decarbonisation of the electricity grid. It is really important, going forward, to have these ambitious targets to work towards, but there are obviously risks involved. The number one risk that is flashing up red on the dashboard in terms of delivery of all the required infrastructure is with our planning system. I know the Government get this, and I was very pleased to see the planning and infrastructure Bill in the gracious Speech. In fact, I met the National Energy System Operator earlier today, and its work on the spatial strategic energy plan will also be central to derisking this. However, we have seen a number of issues with our infrastructure projects coming through the system, and I shall give noble Lords a few examples.

In my sector—the nuclear sector—the environmental assessments for the Hinkley Point C reactor ran to around 20,000 pages and those for Sizewell C to around 44,000 pages. That is a stack of paper around 5 metres high—the height of a double-decker bus. As a broader example, the planning application for the lower Thames crossing, which was mentioned earlier, ran to 359,000 pages. If you put all that documentation end to end, it would be around 61 miles, about five times the length of the crossing itself. That is just one metric, but it clearly illustrates that we have issues with our planning system that we need to resolve to get Britain building. This is important not just for the energy system but, more broadly, to get economic growth going again in this country.

In the last Parliament, we made some important progress on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act with an amendment I put forward on town and country planning, which was supported by both current Ministers on the Front Bench. We got a great concession from the Government, but we spent part of the last Session thinking about what more we could do for large infrastructure projects. We have a number of proposals following our consultation with industry, which I hope the Minister will be interested in.

One issue in the nuclear industry is that when, for example, the environmental regulators look at infrastructure, their concern is with the environmental considerations for the piece of land on which the asset is situated. They do not take the broader societal benefits to net zero and energy security into account. We need a way of framing this and putting a net-zero duty on the Environment Agency and the other statutory consultees in the process for these large infrastructure projects. We believe that could be a very good way of balancing local environmental considerations with the broader benefits that large infrastructure projects bring. This was supported in the last Session by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, when she brought forward an amendment proposing a net-zero duty for Ofgem. We should embed this more broadly across the regulators. I would very much welcome further discussions on that.

The habitats regulations have been highlighted as a specific area of concern. At Hinkley Point C, an infamous acoustic fish deterrent system was put forward to prevent the problem of fish stocks in the cooling water intakes for the plant. It led to millions of pounds of spend and years of delay. We need a more sensible regime for these compensatory events in terms of impact on the environment. In the Energy Act 2023,

[LORD RAVENSDALE]

the previous Government took powers to modify the habitats regulations for offshore projects and oil and gas so that there could be a more sensible regime where compensatory measures are pooled rather than considered as individual cases. Considering the impact that those regulations have had, looking at a minor amendment to that Act to give the Government more powers to look at the habitats regulations and speed these projects through the system would be very sensible.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bloomfield, laid out an excellent pitch for the nuclear industry, which I will not repeat. In his opening remarks, the Minister made some great points about the impact of the war in Ukraine on our energy security. We have made really good progress there in the last few years, but our nuclear industry is still dependent on Russia for nuclear fuel in some of our reactor fleet. We clearly need to address this urgently from the perspectives of national security and energy security. The Government need to look at legislating to ban Russian nuclear fuel in the near term.

It is important to note that our allies, such as the United States, which are much more exposed to Russian nuclear fuel have taken the step of legislating to ban. That would also benefit our domestic industries by bringing up our own domestic nuclear fuel supply chain. I very much welcome the opportunity to meet the Ministers to discuss these issues in the context of the forthcoming legislation, and I look forward to working with them both in the coming Session.

4.39 pm

Baroness Parminter (LD): My Lords, at this late stage in the debate, I will merely add my voice to the cacophony of congratulations to the new Front Bench and Government at this important time in our country's history for those of us who are concerned about the environment and nature.

We have heard from other noble Peers about the announcements today by the Climate Change Committee that we are off-track on net zero, which go alongside the announcements in the recent past by the Office for Environmental Protection that we are also off-track on our nature targets. Time is not on our side. We have a new Government, who are already showing commitment in this space, and therefore we welcome them to the job. Although I do not wish to sow dissent with my new partners on the Opposition Benches, I slightly took issue with the comments by the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, that he saw the previous Government as the greenest Government ever. I merely respond that he should have gone to Specsavers.

I welcome a number of Bills in the gracious Speech, the first of which is the new Great British Energy Bill, which has been mentioned by a number of colleagues. We need to move at pace to get the renewable energy our country so desperately needs. As the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, mentioned, it is fantastic to see the appointment of Chris Stark. He is focused on delivery and has a good reputation in the business and political spheres. That can only be to the good, so we welcome that Bill and look forward to it coming before the House.

The other Bill that I particularly welcome, which will come as no surprise to colleagues around the House, is of course the water Bill. For those of us here

and elsewhere who have focused for so long on the quality of our rivers, lakes and seas, it is important and good to see the Government picking up this issue. However, like the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, and the noble Lord, Lord Gascoigne, I think that the Bill might need to go a little further. I look forward to playing my part in ensuring that that job is done; we will be constructive in our role in opposition on that.

In the time I have here today—I do not want to take up my nine minutes because noble Lords are getting fed up—I will focus on three issues. The first is about building nature restoration into the Government's welcome plans to build new homes and infrastructure. On these Benches, we know that we need new homes in this country and people need places to live. However, if we are to meet our nature targets, nature needs places to live, feed and breed—which means space. We can do that by clever building specifications—in the same way that we can have zero-carbon specifications to move towards our net-zero goals—and we can have swift boxes and hedgerow highways, but we also need space. So it is encouraging to see that the Government have committed to this new mechanism for developers to fund nature restoration.

Unlike some other noble Peers who have spoken today—including the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, with whom I rarely disagree—I was pleased that this House stood up so strongly to defend the nutrient neutrality position last year, in the face of the proposals that the previous Government were bringing forward to water it down. We were right to do that, and I am pleased to see that this Government are committed to the idea that developers need to look to paying towards nature restoration at the same time as building much-needed homes. I am pleased that they are also looking to consult with wildlife delivery groups as they look to possible alternatives. The old system is not perfect—we all said that when it came before us—and needs amending, but we must be careful that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater and that, if we are to replace it, we really deliver for nature. As a party, we look forward to being part of that discussion.

In the spirit of the noble Earl, Lord Russell, who said that as a party in opposition we will be only too delighted for the Government to nick good ideas that we have, one of the good ideas we have is around biodiversity net gain, which was introduced by the last Government—and welcomed—but which had its ambitions viciously curbed in that major infrastructure projects were excluded from having to abide by the biodiversity net gain obligations. That is a missed opportunity. Equally, our party believes that the 10% requirements on biodiversity net gain need to be ratcheted up. Therefore, for larger housing developments, over 25 homes, there should be a sliding scale upwards with an increasing percentage of biodiversity net gain. I urge the new Government to look at our proposal around biodiversity net gain, which will help deliver the homes we need but also ensure that developers pay their rightful amount.

Secondly, there is plenty in the gracious Speech on improving public transport, which is extremely welcome both for economic growth and delivering on our net-zero targets. However, given the contribution of transport to our emissions, if we are going to meet our net-zero

targets we must also look at passenger cars, which means speeding up fast now on EVs. Although the Government had some very welcome commitments in their manifesto around EVs, as we move from the early adopter phase to mass market there is a glaring omission around fairness.

I note with great pleasure that one of the three principles in the King's Speech was that issue of fairness. However, I urge the Government, as they look to scale up the country, and as we have to move towards more electric vehicles, to look at the VAT disparity on the costs of charging your electric vehicle. If you live, as I do, in a home with a garage, you can charge your EV with a 5% VAT rate. People on a lower income are charged on the streets at a 20% rate. We know how individuals and political parties will stoke up these issues to create division, and I can see this as an issue coming down the track when more people are buying EVs and realising that they pay a higher rate for their EV charging compared with those people who have the luxury of doing it at home. This is a real issue of fairness and I hope that the Government, who I think are genuinely committed, will look at it and do it quickly before people in other places start using it as a means to create division on the whole net-zero agenda.

Thirdly and finally, on something that I hope this Government will do, it was fantastic to see the noble Lord, Lord Vallance, in his place a moment ago because this was an issue he raised when he came before the House of Lords Select Committee on Environment and Climate Change when we did an inquiry into mobilising behaviour change for net zero. We were looking at the whole issue of how we get people to change behaviour and do things that they are not used to doing, picking up new technologies, changing the way they live their lives and buying new products. Yes, you can do that through introducing new Bills, as the Government are doing here today, and through fiscal incentives, but you also have to tell people what they need to do. The words to the committee of the noble Lord, Lord Vallance, were, "We need to tell people what they need to do".

This Government, at the start of their mandate, have a very clear vision about net zero—unlike the previous Government, I am sad to say. They are on one track and they are moving us forward in the right direction. However, we need to take the public with us. They need to be informed and there needs to be consensus. That requires a public engagement strategy by this Government now, at the start of their term, making it clear to people that we are all in this together, all government departments are singing from the same hymn sheet, and we will help people overcome the barriers, but we will get there. If we do not do that, we will miss a major opportunity and we risk not getting to where we need to be on net zero.

4.48 pm

Earl Attlee (Con): My Lords, I intend to be brief. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Fuller on his maiden speech.

I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, for introducing the debate. We have sparred for many years, and I know how much he enjoys my

supplementary question technique. His speech was slightly disappointing: he expressed no sentiments that I disagreed with.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, I will try to do better in the future.

Earl Attlee (Con): I am full of optimism for this Parliament and strongly support the proposed planning reforms, including for offshore wind, and I agree with everything that was said by the noble Lord, Lord Rooker. I just worry that the Government's proposals will not go far enough, though I think they will unlock development. I assure the Government that I will do nothing to impede these reforms. I have already checked my diary; I have business meetings on every conceivable day that we will be voting against these proposals. We have allowed the population of the United Kingdom to grow significantly. If we increase the population, it is inevitable that we must bring more land into development, not just for housing but for employment. The noble Lord, Lord Rooker, explained why this is not a problem.

I see far too many businesses operating in units that are too small, badly organised and inefficiently laid out, and with no space for new and more modern machinery. This results in them having to send goods to another factory, using transport and emissions, in order to carry out a further process. We need to improve the supply of industrial premises. I hope that some of the Government's planning reforms will make that easier. A few years ago, I wanted to buy a small industrial unit near home, near Portsmouth. I gave up. I could not buy a small industrial unit—there were none.

The noble Lord, Lord Hunt, talked about GB Energy. I know that private funding will be leveraged in, but I wonder whether the amount of money he is talking about is going to be enough to make a difference.

My noble friends Lady Moyo and Lord Lilley talked about the increase in electricity demand. There is demand from data centres but also for charging heavy goods vehicles, which uses a huge amount of electricity. Problems are arising with the movement of new heavy electrical equipment. Some of these high-voltage DC transformers that enable electricity to be transmitted long distances weigh 200 to 300 tonnes. There are serious and complex technical and regulatory problems, and several government departments are involved. I am doing what I can to help, and will be engaging with Ministers and officials. I am the subject matter expert and I am not convinced that a layman working from a brief will be able to perform the same function that I do, but no one else in Parliament has the knowledge. Once I am ejected from your Lordships' House, who will look after this industrial problem?

Finally, I support onshore wind turbines. Of course there are adverse effects, but carbon reduction surely is a priority. I am afraid that I am not convinced by the arguments laid out by my noble friend Lady McIntosh.

4.52 pm

Lord Mawson (CB): My Lords, I too begin by adding my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman. I wish them well in their new roles.

[LORD MAWSON]

There is something very reassuring and sensible about the British constitution. At the end of a Parliament, it sweeps away everything before it; all the old baggage is gone and we are all given a fresh start, and can all begin again. I wish this new Government well as they take on some very serious challenges; they have made a good start. However, the dysfunctional machinery of the state, which prevents growth and which was there before the election, has not been magically swept away. It remains stubbornly in place, and its track record of mediocrity and poor delivery remains. Instead of supporting challenged communities, it hampers them, so often stifling creativity and innovation rather than encouraging it. Treacle-like processes and impenetrable bureaucratic systems that wrap themselves around every move that the practitioner makes remain defiantly in place. They test the patience of all of us who are involved in the practical delivery of housing and the building of new communities on the ground across this country.

Many of us have spent our lives unravelling the housing disasters of the 1960s and 1970s, which continue to adversely impact so many poorer people's lives today. We must now join the dots at a local level between housing, the environment, education and health. Yes, we need to build more houses, but, even more importantly, we need to create more joined-up, aspirational cultures at place, which take seriously the residents who live there. We need to see residents as agents of change—practitioners, not consultees to be consulted to death. We need to create mixed entrepreneurial communities and move on from outdated last-century debates about public versus private. It is not about building just houses; it is about building integrated communities.

Those of us who are building businesses and organisations that operate nationally know that the way into these often apparently impenetrable issues is to focus on the micro and not the macro. Understand what is happening in one place or one street in granular detail, and the disconnects that are going on there, and you will start to understand every challenged community across this country and the machinery that is often failing them, missing real talent and preventing growth.

The problem with the siloed headings for the next few days of debate on the humble Address is that, in the real world, housing, the environment, healthcare, education et cetera do not sit neatly in these tidy, separate silos; they are profoundly connected. Those of us who have been responsible for building modern integrated primary healthcare facilities—and, in our case, a very successful housing association—know from practical experience how connected these worlds are.

All the data is telling us that the future of the health service has to be about getting upstream into the social determinants of health. The biggest influences on people's health outcomes are social, not doctors. My colleagues and I have seen this in granular detail, over the last 40 years, through our work in east London housing estates. The real health issues are to do with: "Do I have a decent home to live in with my family?", "Do I have a job?", "Is the school any good?", "Are the people I mix with aspirational?", "Is the environment quality encouraging a thriving culture or are we investing in more poor-quality housing estates, defined by

dependency cultures, where the grass is not cut and rubbish and graffiti are everywhere?" Over the last 40 years, my colleagues and I have focused on building practical working models, with local residents, of what this more joined-up world can look like in practice, with the data nowadays to prove it. I declare my interests.

The results and data are clear to see, but the Government's Regulator of Social Housing and other agencies, with all their treacle-like processes, are still undermining this work. Their unwillingness to innovate and join up our systems and processes on the ground, at place, must now be firmly grasped. Wes Streeting will not be able to help us get upstream into the prevention agenda if we do not do this. I welcome the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, who is clearly having a similar problem with another regulator.

This Government are right to focus on growth, but growth begins in local communities, at place. I would be very happy to show the Minister a practical example of what success looks like in this regard, in what was a formerly failing street in Tower Hamlets. I was asked by then CEO of Tower Hamlets Council, Christine Gilbert, to intervene following a murder and considerable violence. We now have some incredible data. We did this by bringing all the players together and creating a 360-degrees culture. We joined the dots, at the top, middle and front line, between the local authority, the NHS and the housing association. We breathed life and energy into a failing culture. We brought it together and focused on people and relationships. I am happy to show the Minister what this looks like on the ground, but please could they bring with them their health, education, business and environment colleagues? Health, housing and the environment are connected. They are everybody's business.

Let us be realistic about what we think the state can and cannot achieve. Let us strengthen the hand of practitioners with a track record of delivery on the ground. Let us have a simple policy: back success wherever you see it. Then we will grow the economy. The clues as to how you do this, I suggest, are in the micro—at place—not in the macro. We need to embrace a learning-by-doing culture, and we need to back people who are practical and who get things done.

4.59 pm

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere (Con): My Lords, I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, and indeed all my Labour friends and colleagues. We are very lucky to live in a country where power changes in the way it does, where civil government is civil and politics are polite. Nobody is exiled or shot—in fact, raising the bar a little higher, there is not even really the prospect here, as there is in many of our allied countries, of a party refusing to accept the outcome and going to law. I think we can take that for granted. I hope we all want Britain to succeed, and that means wanting this Government to succeed.

I will focus this afternoon on areas not just where I think the party opposite can succeed but where it can succeed by the metric of comprehensively outperforming the outgoing Government. There were two spectacular candidates in the King's Speech. One is healthcare, which your Lordships will debate tomorrow. Even within

the red lines set by the Health Secretary, the fruit is not so much low hanging as piled up in great snowdrifts, because the previous Government were so terrified of being accused of privatisation if they allowed any mechanisms of internal markets.

But I will talk about housing. I share my noble friend Lord Attlee's enthusiasm for the speeches given at the beginning of the debate from the Front Bench. The noble Lord, Lord Hunt, set out the problem extremely well. We do not build enough houses in this country, and we have not been doing so since the 1960s. Housing has been falling as a proportion of our population for longer than I have been alive.

The problem has accelerated as our population has grown. In the last 15 years, population has increased through immigration by 5 million, 1.5 million of that within the last two years, and housing stock has fallen in percentage terms commensurately. What are the results of this? Well, we can see them whenever we compare this country with our nearest neighbours. The average size of a dwelling here is two-thirds the average in France, Germany or the Low Countries. Rents here are 1.5 times higher on average. Rents in London are twice what they are in Paris and three times what they are in Berlin. The number of young people who own their own house has fallen by 51% since 1989.

So much for the diagnosis—what about the prescription? Here again I have some grounds for optimism in what we have heard from the Front Bench opposite. Particularly, it is a good idea to begin by calling in some decisions that have been held up, often with trivial and vexatious objections. I agree 100% with the onshore wind decision, and it is an example of how quickly things can be done. I struggle to see why that logic does not extend to fracking or, indeed, to the issue of North Sea drilling. I very much share my noble friend Lord Ashcombe's concerns that, by simply stopping getting our own energy here, we are driving up the environmental costs of bringing it in from elsewhere, since all sides agree that, at least during the transition, we will need some of it. But I promised to be positive, so I will not dwell on that and I will go back to the question of calling in these decisions.

I hope that this Government will have a general presumption in favour of infrastructure. A great many projects have been hanging around for an inordinate length of time. If there is a tunnel or an interconnector, build the wretched thing—there is no point in having yet more rounds of consultation. The proposed interconnector to Portsmouth would bring in as much clean energy as a brand-new, state-of-the-art nuclear power station, yet it has been held up again and again, without, as far as I can see, even that much local objection to it—there is some very vocal local objection, but it is not universal. The lower Thames crossing would free up immensely the capacity of our ports, as well as relieving pressure on the Dartford Crossing. If you have these projects, use the power to call them in and get them done.

But that is only a short-term fix, not a long-term solution. We cannot govern the country by a series of these decisions made by one Minister in Whitehall; we need to reform the system more widely. Again, this comes down to how we build more houses. I was delighted to hear the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, talk

about new towns, but it is important that we build new towns where people want to live. That generally does not mean putting them in the middle of the countryside somewhere; it almost always means putting them on the edge of an existing town.

The railway station I commute here from every day is in Basingstoke, my nearest town. I hope that none of my neighbours in Basingstoke will take it the wrong way when I say that not even the most patriotic local would say that it is the loveliest town in the country. It was a new town, but I think that if you had to choose between Basingstoke and, let us say, the new town of Edinburgh, it is kind of a no-brainer as to which is the more architecturally pleasing.

A number of proposals for significant urban expansion were in the in-tray of the outgoing Government. My right honourable friend Michael Gove spoke about them at the beginning of last year: the expansion of Leeds, the expansion of east London and, above all, the idea of a new town in Cambridge. If I may say so, these are very early tests of whether the party opposite means what it says about capacity. They will need to be actioned sooner rather than later.

This will also mean lifting the noose from around some of our cities that goes under the name of the green belt, which I think is an extraordinary bit of mismarketing. A couple of years ago a think tank ran a competition for people to photograph the ugliest bits of green-belt land they could find, and it was deluged with images of car washes, petrol stations and rubbish heaps. A lot of what is called green-belt land is scrub-land, but because we are not able to build in it, the building has to take place in genuinely green fields, which is what most people understand when they hear the phrase "green belt". Again, that did not happen under the last Government—let us be frank about this—because a lot of the local MPs had association chairmen who were district or borough councillors. I think that is less of a problem, looking at the electoral geography of the country, and that too is an early test. By the way, the green belt in Bristol begins one mile from the city centre. How can the cities where people want to live grow if they are asphyxiated in this artificial way?

I will end with one suggestion: we can go for what my late friend Roger Scruton used to call gentle density. In our cities we have some of the lowest density in the advanced world. If we moved to a slightly more normal model by European standards of having comfortable, spacious, four or five-storey buildings with family apartments, we would solve a lot of the problems that noble Lords opposite have identified. There are some changes that could be made very quickly, not all of them requiring primary legislation. We could have a presumption in favour of building mansards or upward extensions in cities. We could allow for street votes or estate votes on greater densification. The noble Lord, Lord Mawson, was talking just now about Tower Hamlets. I saw that there was a project in Tower Hamlets where an estate that had contained 24 houses has increased to 202. All the previous residents got a bigger house; they had to vote to do it, but it helped tackle the problem. A similar one in Lambeth has gone from 135 to 441 houses, plus a gym and other amenities. Make it easier by giving communities a stake in expansion, to get that kind of gentle density through.

[LORD HANNAN OF KINGSCLERE]

I would ideally like to scrap, or at least massively overhaul, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. If you look at any village, the ugly houses tend to begin around 1947. If anything has failed on its own terms, it is that legislation—but I think that would be asking too much.

I end with a proposal put forward by my friend the writer Sam Bowman that he calls the 1894 project. It is named after the London Building Act 1894. Give buildings in the Greater London area or within a mile of surrounding tube stations or the Elizabeth line a presumption that they can grow up to seven or eight stories, equivalent to what every other city in Europe did.

These are decisions that have a high upfront political cost and the economic gain comes later, so I urge noble Lords opposite not to hang around, because as the next election comes closer, the political costs become more visible and the economic gains get pushed to the other side of the election, so

“If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly”.

5.09 pm

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley (Lab): My Lords, I add my congratulations to my noble friends Lord Hunt of Kings Heath and Lady Hayman of Ullock. They will make outstanding contributions to His Majesty's Government. I declare my interest as a trustee of the Nationwide Foundation, a charity established by the Nationwide Building Society in 1997 to deliver social change. It particularly concentrates on tackling housing and homelessness. Being the last contributor from the Back Benches is a tough gig. It was suggested to me that maybe I should have a word with the new Chief Whip, but I decided against that.

I want to use this time to talk about the private rented sector. The private rented sector is in need of reform and the renters' rights Bill is a welcome introduction. Too many people live in unsafe, insecure and unaffordable housing. The statistics make grim reading. For example, increasing numbers of private renters face homelessness, more than 130,000 children live in temporary accommodation and 1.3 million children live in the private rented sector, where one in five homes falls short of basic decency standards. This means childhoods are blighted by poor housing, family budgets are stretched to breaking point to pay the rent, and vulnerable people are trapped in accommodation that does not meet their needs. Too many families therefore live without the foundation of a good-quality, secure home. Without that stability, they fail truly to fulfil their potential, which is why I believe that the lack of decent affordable homes is one of the most pressing social and economic problems facing families today, and why it is critical that the Government make fixing the housing emergency that my noble friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath referred to in his opening speech an absolute priority for this Government.

For private renters, the King's Speech yesterday restored some hope. There were a number of legislative proposals that will be welcomed by tenants and the organisations that campaigned for them, but renters have been here before. Noble Lords will remember that rental reform was pledged back in 2019 by the

then Prime Minister Theresa May and what followed were five long years of inaction. Will the Minister assure the House that the new Government will turn this hope into reality and push ahead with rental reform at pace?

It is time to give renters long-term security in their homes with a swift and absolute end to evictions without reason. That means real protection when a landlord wants to sell the property or move a family member in. Two months' notice—just eight weeks—is not long enough for a family to pack up and move out. The notice period needs to be at least four months. Unwanted moves are costly and stressful, and if you have caring responsibilities or a child at a local school these unwanted moves can be extremely disruptive for the whole family. Will the Government consider the suggestion from the consultation in 2019 of a two-year protected period from eviction for reason beyond a tenant's control, which is supported by the Renters' Reform Coalition, and consider all the Renters' Reform Coalition's proposals, in particular an increase in the notice period to at least four months?

It is also critical that the grounds for eviction are reformed and that there are penalties to deter the minority of landlords who may abuse the new grounds. One way to do this is to introduce a longer period when landlords cannot re-let after using a no-fault ground from three months to a year.

As well as security within the private rented sector, we need to address the quality of homes in that sector. One in eight private rented homes in England is unsafe to live in. Applying the decent homes standard to rented homes is therefore welcome. Sadly, some parts of the private rented sector are exploitative and squalid. Renters live in homes full of damp and mould, which is why the application of Awaab's law to the private rented sector is very welcome.

As well as security and quality, we have to address affordability. The Government have recognised the need to outlaw bidding wars, which is essential, but we have to ensure that the increased security that renters are given by tenancy reform in a new Bill is not taken away by allowing rent hikes to go unchecked. The Bill needs to set clear limits to in-tenancy rent increases in order to ensure it delivers the security of tenure that it is designed to.

In addition, the development of a national landlord register could be of immense value to policymakers as well as to tenants and local authorities. Will the Government consider ensuring that the digital private rented sector database is integrated with existing databases for energy performance and gas safety, and consider it as a useful tool to collect information such as rent data and for local authority enforcement?

I turn to the wider housing proposals in the King's Speech. Yesterday's Speech proved that the Government have the will to deliver a national programme of building the homes that our country needs. We need investment in community-led housing projects, which are growing and have the potential to deliver so much more than they currently do. There are brilliant and innovative projects around the country, such as WeCanMake in Bristol, a community-led approach to identifying and building on infill plots in communities to create affordable homes. We have an opportunity to

create these new homes and build new communities in a way that promotes health and well-being and supports a goal that I know is shared across the House: tackling health inequality. If they have not already done so, could the Government look at the Town and Country Planning Association's 12 principles for healthy homes and embed them at the heart of their housing policy?

It is the King's Speech debate so of course we have talked about the proposed legislation, but in my opinion legislation alone will not solve the housing emergency. For too long we have had a piecemeal approach to housing policy-making, which has exacerbated the crisis that we find ourselves in today. As set out by the Nationwide Foundation yesterday, we need to reimagine our housing system. The Homes for All campaign, referred to by the right reverend Prelates the Bishop of St Albans and the Bishop of Chelmsford, was launched by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury a few months ago. Homes for All is an impressive national coalition of organisations and experts from across the housing sector, including the Church of England and the Nationwide Foundation. It wants to create and develop a policy conversation in England about housing and a well-functioning housing system. It has detailed 25 outcomes that can transform England's homes and completely overhaul the current failing system. If the Government have not yet considered the proposals from the Homes for All campaign report then I recommend they do. They should be willing to meet with the Homes for All coalition to discuss shared objectives.

I appreciate that I have asked the Minister a number of questions in this contribution without forward notice, so I ask her to write to me on the points that I have raised. Finally, this is a housing debate and I need to make one final point: it is 2024, not 1824, so will the Minister set out when the Government will scrap the Vagrancy Act?

5.17 pm

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the Government on their superb election results, which were expected. The Lib Dems also had election success that exceeded our predictions and expectations. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on their promotions. I look forward to working with them in the future.

The gracious Speech set out the Government's parliamentary agenda for this Session, and it is going to be a busy but interesting time, as my noble friend Lady Miller of Chilthorne Domer has mentioned. There is much to welcome in the proposed Bills that will be brought forward, and we have had many fascinating contributions today. My noble friends Lord Shipley, Lady Miller and Lady Scott of Needham Market have spoken on the Bills that will affect housing and planning, and my noble friend Lady Scott is a great champion of town and parish councils.

It is undoubtedly true that the planning system as currently operated does not lead to speedy decisions being made, nor are permissions acted upon once granted. Other noble Lords have raised that issue. Meanwhile, families are living in inadequate and unstable accommodation. Vital infrastructure projects are

languishing and a lack of urgency to tackle these problems was absent from the previous Government's outlook. Rural housing should be a priority, with rural exception sites getting developments.

Although there are many who will not welcome the planning and housing proposals being brought forward, no one can deny that the current system is broken and in need of reform. That reform needs to include those farmers who want to invest in producing renewable energy but find themselves constrained by planning regulations. It is time for permitted development rights to include net-zero projects such as on-farm solar, on-farm wind turbines, and agricultural water reserves and slurry stores.

I was delighted to be in the Chamber to hear the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, and congratulate him on his contribution. The noble Lord is an excellent champion of local government and will provide first-class experience in the debates on all its aspects, including devolution, local public transport, building the right houses in the right places and delivering infrastructure projects, alongside food production.

As we are able to speak on only one day, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle, mentioned, I will comment briefly on the subject of banks and make a plea for the Government to promote community banks in this country. Currently, the very influential high street banks make all the running and have set huge obstacles in the way of community banks, making it impossible, in effect, for them to be set up here in the UK. Let us contrast this with the USA, where they have embraced the culture and benefits of community banks, which have thrived as a result. I urge the new Government to set in motion the mechanisms to allow community banks to flourish in the UK.

On energy, I welcome the establishment of Great British Energy. My noble friends Lord Russell and Lady Sheehan have spoken to energy and other aspects of climate change, including the role of green energy. The creation and supply of electricity is a key issue. Businesses depend on electricity for their success. However, the national grid appears to maintain a stand-alone approach to connection services. Both housing and infrastructure projects are stalled, due to lack of connection to the grid. It is not just those responsible for the grid who are dragging their feet, but those who are responsible for inspecting and authorising electrical connections to new businesses. This is desperately slow. My noble friend Lady Parminter raised the difference in the cost of charging electrical vehicles on the high street and in the home.

I turn to illegal sewage dumping, which was a major issue during the election campaign. I welcome the proposals to block the payment of bonuses to those water executives who regularly oversee the discharge of sewage into what were once our gloriously clear rivers, streams and waterways. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans raised the issue of sewage discharges. On these Benches, we have long been supporters of tackling this issue. We look forward to it being one of the early priorities brought forward. Issuing fines and installing real-time monitors at every sewage outlet is to be welcomed. I look forward to the day when my interventions on sewage overflows will no longer be needed and I can move to other subjects.

[BARONESS BAKEWELL OF HARDINGTON MANDEVILLE]

Ofwat is to be given additional powers to ban bonuses for water executives; I hope it is up for it. The Ofwat forward plan has now been published and is out for a consultation, which closes at the end of August. While it is important for this issue to be tackled, and long-overdue investment in the water companies' infrastructure should occur, this should not be at the expense of higher water bills for householders already struggling to make their income stretch to cover all their outgoings. I support the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, on his proposals to reform both the water regulators.

I turn now to those absent measures which I was expecting to see in the gracious Speech as they were trailed in the Labour manifesto. These include the proposed nine new national river walks, one in each region of England, and three new national forests in England, alongside much-needed action to protect and enhance wetlands, peat bogs, and forests. I understand completely that the Government will have pressing priorities they wish to tackle immediately, but could the Minister say whether these and other issues have been postponed until next year or abandoned altogether?

I include in this the move to a circular waste economy. There have been many debates in this Chamber on waste, both household and commercial. Glass and plastic are potentially easy targets for recycling, but implementation has been continually postponed. Waste is one of the chief dangers for wildlife of all species, as they find it discarded in their natural environments and both get tangled up in it and attempt to eat it, leading to very distressing situations. We cannot afford to ignore this problem any longer if the country is to regain some of its depleted biodiversity.

Animal welfare has long been promoted by Labour and was on its to-do list. I was disappointed when the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill was abandoned by the previous Government, and pleased that it had a mention in the Labour manifesto, along with puppy smuggling. The noble Lord, Lord Gascoigne, raised this issue. Previous attempts to tackle puppy smuggling were unsuccessful. This is an invidious trade, exploiting both the puppies themselves and their mothers. I look forward to supporting this measure when it comes forward. Does the Minister have a timeframe for this?

While on the subject of animals, I refer to the possible ban on the import of fur and fur products; 77% of the public are in favour of this measure. I have spoken against the current MoD practice of importing Canadian bear pelts to make bearskin busbies for the Grenadier Guards to wear. Surely, to goodness, now is the time to switch from animal skins to synthetic material for this ceremonial use.

Lastly, I turn to the plight of the British farmer, who has seen their income reduce following the phasing out of the basic farm payments. I should say that I fully support the implementation of ELMS, but it needs to be far more transparent than it has been previously. Food security is vital. We can see from the conflicts around the world that a secure supply of food is critical.

The plan operated by Defra is not transparent, and farmers have no real confidence in the full transition to ELMS, especially where it relates to uplands and tenant farmers. The noble Lord, Lord Harlech, referred

to ELMS. I know this is a subject dear to the Minister's heart and I hope that she has some encouraging words on the implementation and further rollout of ELMS, and food production. The noble Lord, Lord Curry of Kirkharle, also raised this issue.

Before I finish, I would like to stress the need for a land use framework. The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, the noble Lords, Lord Roborough and Lord Curry of Kirkharle, and the noble Earl, Lord Devon, all raised this issue. The work on this has been completed by the committee chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington. Now, at the beginning of this Parliament, is the time to see this vital framework pushed ahead, so that many of the Bills the Government are proposing can be implemented to the greatest effect and the best use can be made of our limited land supply.

5.28 pm

Baroness Swinburne (Con): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, on their roles. Although I speak late in the day, it is no less heartfelt for that. Indeed, I congratulate all noble Lords taking on new ministerial roles.

Cross-departmental working will be key to unlocking economic growth. As I and all the other former Ministers know, in government there are many conflicting agendas, and who wins and how issues get resolved inter-departmentally matters. The question will be: will economic growth be the ultimate litmus test? I was interested to hear the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, suggest that the three-way tensions in energy for security, affordability and sustainability would be diminished by the green agenda, but I suggest that they have not gone away, and that those tensions in government will exist no matter what.

I could cite lots of examples, but I will mention just a few. Large-scale solar farms and energy security are up against food security in many instances. Housing need is up against nutrient neutrality. One tension that I have had to speak to in this House before is environmental and meeting-net-zero needs versus steelworkers' employment in Port Talbot. Some 20% of Wales's carbon emissions are produced by the steelworks in Port Talbot. Swapping to new arc steel production will be better for the climate and for health in Wales and it will support measures for steelworkers to retrain and benefit from what could be the largest offshore wind energy investment—in Swansea Bay.

These current versus future trade-offs will be really important. They will not be easy to resolve, but collaborative working, not siloed departmental decisions, will be needed to make sure these things can happen. As the noble Baronesses, Lady Hayman and Lady Parminter, said, there will be trade-offs, but the public need to understand the rationale behind the decisions so that they can support them. The noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, and the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, suggested that a balance will need to be found. To sound a note of caution, perhaps, to the new Ministers: beware of judicial review.

The UK has halved emissions, while growing the economy by 80%. We were the first economy to legislate to be net zero by 2050, and achieved a record in recent

years for energy generation in onshore and offshore wind. Offshore wind increased by 27% in 2022 alone and has reduced our reliance on coal as a fuel source by 86% since 2010. It is easy to forget what we have already achieved. Indeed, the new government green bond for UK savers has been launched, and we have secured over £300 billion of investment in low-carbon energy projects.

While trying to achieve some of these ambitions in climate, net zero and biodiversity, the previous Government tried to balance protecting family finances. Building on past achievements as a leading nation in carbon reduction, we support the Government in their aspirations on energy and many other matters. In line with the excellent contributions on sustainable energy by the noble Lords, Lord Roborough and Lord Lilley, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and many others, the noble Baroness, Lady Moyo, gave a stark warning, which I found really interesting, about the future demand that AI expansion might put on the system and the energy instability and price volatility that might be ahead.

How will the Government ensure that GB Energy facilitates private capital investment in green infrastructure, rather than competing with private capital that is currently available for sustainable energy projects? Can the Minister reassure the House that this is not an unnecessary tier of bureaucracy or nationalisation but rather a way to incentivise private risk capital? Given the future energy demand shocks mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Moyo, it is reassuring to hear the commitment not just to existing nuclear facilities but to support Sizewell C. As my noble friend Lady Bloomfield suggested, nuclear needs to be at the centre of a green, sustainable energy strategy.

I turn to housing and particularly the private rented sector. As many noble Lords know, I have spent many weeks and months looking at this topic. As shown by the progress of the previous Bill through both Houses before the Dissolution of Parliament, we on these Benches support a fairer private rented sector that, over time, will remove no-fault evictions and replace them with specific grounds for possession by a landlord. Giving tenants more security of tenure and empowering them to challenge poor conditions is appropriate. However, the vast majority of the 4.6 million households living in the private rented sector have good landlords, so, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, said, it will be important to deliver reform in a way that both protects tenants' security and retains landlords' confidence in the new system.

We support a private rented sector ombudsman, as has been suggested in the Chamber, and we support the creation of a private rented property portal, the application of the decent homes standard, and making it illegal for landlords and agents to have blanket bans that discriminate, as many have raised today. However, we also need a thriving private rented sector, where private landlords provide renters with high-quality housing and increased security in return for the ability to charge a fair market rent and reclaim their properties when circumstances need them to.

Now that I am no longer a Minister, I can express sympathy with the position of the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, on fixed-term contracts being allowed

when the tenant requests one. Sadly, I did not convince my department of the merits of this—as a tenant myself, I would certainly appreciate it—so I leave it to others to do so as we move forward.

We need to balance the needs of those living in private rented properties with a proportionate regime that does not deter our individual landlords from making their properties available. Some 43% of landlords own single rented properties, and a further 39% own only between two and four. Most of these are not bad landlords, and they care about their tenants—many are in this Chamber, as I heard during the lobbying over the last few weeks. But language matters. Many of these landlords are leaving the sector. We have no concrete data—only estimates from the annual English Housing Survey—but, anecdotally, they seem to be selling up. We therefore need to understand what we can do to make sure that the balance is right and what other things might come into the mix.

As mentioned by my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham, other countries' rental stock is usually held by the financial sector, particularly pension funds, which take a long-term view of their investments and provide professional management. They do not need things such as Section 21 notices. Successive Governments have recognised this, and the profile has shifted over the last 20 years, with an increased participation of institutional investment, supported by a number of interventions, to support the Build to Rent sector. According to Savills, there are now over 100,000 Build to Rent homes, which is forecasted to rise to over 360,000 by 2033. Build to Rent boosts housing supply more quickly, diversifying the private rented sector and increasing quality and choice for renters, especially in areas of high demand in our big cities and towns across England. Will the Minister confirm, either today or as soon as she is able, whether the new Government will continue to support this investment in the sector?

Previous amendments were made to provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the new tenancy system and to deliver an annual parliamentary update on the state of the private rented sector, including the stock of properties. Will the Government commit to doing this? Of course, none of these measures improving tenants' lot will actually work unless there is enforcement. Sadly, this is not currently happening in the majority of local authorities throughout the country. We need to find a way of prioritising this, as many have failed to use even their existing powers to deter bad landlords.

On new homes, I am proud that the previous Government met their target this month for building 1 million new homes in the last Parliament. Given the economic difficulties, it was not an easy ask. Although we did not manage our target of 300,000 new builds per year, we delivered more than 2.5 million additional homes since 2010—696,000 of them were affordable homes.

Building new homes at a faster rate has been a shared aspiration, but in many areas it is about where people need and want them. Housebuilding is nearly impossible due to outdated and inappropriate rules on nutrient neutrality derived originally from the EU. We know from listening to many noble friends and other noble Lords in this Chamber today that some 100,000

[BARONESS SWINBURNE]

new homes need to be unlocked when we find a solution for that problem. Together with other planning difficulties, such as connectivity of new sustainable developments to the grid, some of the objections and conditions applied by statutory consultee bodies make building new homes at scale challenging and less economically viable. I look forward to seeing the detailed plans surrounding many of these challenges and wish the Government well in finding new methods of working across government to deliver a balanced and fairer system that genuinely accelerates housebuilding of a high calibre, providing families with quality homes in places where they want to live and work, including especially for our young people.

Cross-departmental working will also be needed to deliver GB Energy and better environmental outcomes—not just net zero—to provide food security as well as energy security while delivering economic growth. As we say in Welsh, pob lwc.

5.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Baroness Hayman of Ullock) (Lab): My Lords, what a great pleasure it is to conclude today's debate. I thank His Majesty for his gracious Speech and all noble Lords for their participation and insightful questions. It is also good to see the noble Lord, Lord Roborough, and the noble Baroness, Lady Swinburne, in their places. I also thank many noble Lords for their warm welcomes to me and my noble friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath to this debate.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Fuller, for his fantastic maiden speech. He did himself proud and we look forward to his many further contributions in this House.

We have discussed themes around energy, the environment and housing—matters which are critical to people's everyday experiences, their homes and the immediate and real world around them, wherever they may live. This Government recognise the opportunity we have to shape the policy landscape in these areas to bring about tangible change to improve outcomes and, ultimately, the quality of people's lives. We have covered some specific challenges during this debate, but I am also pleased that there has been much support for and interest in our proposed legislation.

I cannot respond to every noble Lord who has spoken, but I will do my best to cover what I can in the time available and will of course write to noble Lords if I am unable to answer their questions today. I shall first speak to the debate on energy. The Government will work with the private sector to double onshore wind, triple solar power, and quadruple offshore wind by 2030. We will invest in carbon capture and storage, hydrogen and marine energy to ensure we have the long-term energy storage that our country needs.

Our Great British Energy Bill will establish a new, publicly owned energy company and play a key role in our plan to boost energy security, create new jobs and decarbonise the power sector. It will accelerate the deployment of renewables, reducing the UK's exposure to volatile global fossil fuel prices, and drive forward our ambition to make Britain a clean energy superpower. There have been a number of questions on this. My

noble friend Lady Liddell of Coatdyke spoke about the opportunities that Great British Energy can bring and about CCS—I will very much welcome being pestered by her in the future.

The noble Lord, Lord Roborough, the noble Baroness, Lady Swinburne, and others asked for further information about Great British Energy. The cost to the taxpayer of its set-up and investments will be carefully managed and monitored through Parliament, and investments will be subject to safeguards and risk assessments, similar to established public finance institutions. Specific arrangements will be announced in due course. There will also be incentives for energy investment without penalising the consumer, and renewables will continue to be supported through the contracts for difference scheme.

I assure the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, that the energy independence Bill has not been shelved. Legislation relating to our energy independence will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, asked about subsidies. In contrast to government subsidies, Great British Energy will make revenue-generating investments, which as well as helping to drive our clean power mission will deliver a financial return to UK taxpayers.

The second of the Government's five missions is to become a clean energy superpower, so it is important that we invest in renewables. We believe that clean power by 2030 is achievable and should be prioritised. Every fraction of a degree by which we can limit global warming will reduce the severity of climate impacts.

I assure the noble Baroness, Lady Bloomfield, that this Government fully support the nuclear industry, and assure the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, that I understand his concerns around infrastructure development, as for many years I worked on the connections into Hinkley Point C.

The noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Pickering, asked about energy from waste. We are going to create a road map to a circular economy, supporting sustainable economic growth by driving up resource efficiency and reducing our emissions and waste. As part of that, we will consider the role of waste incineration and the threat and opportunity it poses for circularity, economic growth and net zero.

Before I turn to the environment, I reiterate the Government's commitment to animal welfare, which a number of noble Lords asked about. I am sure noble Lords know that animal welfare is a cause very close to my heart, and the Government are going to deliver the most ambitious programme of animal welfare for a generation. I look forward to delivering on the animal welfare commitments in our manifesto, as part of a wider programme of improvements in this area. We are developing plans to enable us to tackle the horrendous crimes of puppy smuggling and puppy farming, to close loopholes on trail hunting and to ban snares and the import of hunting trophies. Not all our ambitions in this area require legislation; we can drive forward significant improvements in animal welfare and species conservation by other means. The noble Lord, Lord Colgrain, specifically mentioned livestock worrying, and we completely recognise the distress of this. I would be happy to discuss that with him further.

On the subject of the environment, we are committed to the 13 legally binding environmental targets set out under the Environment Act 2021, covering air quality, water, biodiversity, resource efficiency and waste reduction, tree and woodland cover and marine protected areas. We will work to make the environmental improvement plan fit for purpose, ensuring that there is a clear delivery path to make progress in these critical areas so that we can start to see results.

We have heard loud and clear that change is needed on water. We have heard how water companies have pumped record levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas, failing both customers and the environment. We are also aware of the outrage at the amount of money paid out in bonuses to sewage company executives. Water company bosses should not be rewarded for constantly polluting our waterways, and we will not tolerate poor performance. Our water special measures Bill will turn around the performance of water companies and ensure that they and their executives are held firmly to account when their activities harm the environment and are not in line with customer interests. The Bill will strengthen regulation to ensure that water bosses face personal criminal liability for law-breaking and will introduce new powers to bring automatic and severe fines. The Bill will also give the water regulator new powers to ban the payment of bonuses if environmental standards are not met.

There is a lack of public trust in the water industry. We need to strengthen public protection by enabling Ofwat to set a code of conduct for water companies to boost accountability for water executives, so that customers can also summon board members and hold executives to account. We have also already published a Written Statement on water, if noble Lords would like to look that up.

Noble Lords have mentioned that the Bill that we are going to introduce only scratches the surface and that there are many other fundamental issues with the water industry that need addressing. I just want to assure noble Lords that, following the initial Bill, the Government will outline further legislation to fundamentally transform our water industry to restore our rivers, lakes and seas to good health. I look forward to working with noble Lords as we develop this further legislation.

On the point from the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, about monitoring, we will require water companies to install real-time monitors at every sewage outlet, with data independently scrutinised by the water regulators.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, asked about customer bills. There is no intention for customers to pay for the poor performance of water companies. The money for vital infrastructure investment will be ring-fenced and spent only on upgrades that benefit customers and the environment. Ofwat will ensure that where money for investment is not spent, companies will refund customers.

On farming, a number of people asked about agriculture and the fact that it was not mentioned in the King's Speech. I was very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, for explaining his meeting with my honourable friend Daniel Zeichner MP. We are

committed to supporting farmers and to the environmental land management scheme. We will confirm plans for the rollout and our wider approach as soon as possible.

My noble friend Lady Ritchie asked a number of questions around working with the Northern Ireland Government and organisations, and I am happy to discuss this with her further.

On bovine TB, our objective is to achieve bovine TB-free status in England. There is no simple way to do this; there is no simple tool to eradicate the disease in isolation. We will be setting out more detail in due course.

On land use, I confirm that we will introduce a land use framework. It will consider food security and how we can expand nature-rich habitats such as wetlands, peat bogs and forests.

The noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, asked about sustainable food production. We do not believe that the transition to more climate-friendly practices should come at the expense of food production. I am very happy to continue our previous discussions on this matter.

I turn to housing. The Government promised to put planning reform at the centre of our mission for government and to act decisively and quickly to support our commitment to 1.5 million homes over the new Parliament, to unlock clean energy and to further our wider growth mission. To noble Lords who have said that this is complicated and there are many departments involved in this, I would say that this is why we have a mission approach—in order to bring departments together to deliver for the country.

This Government were elected with a mandate to get Britain building again. We were also elected on a platform of doing so while protecting the environment. We are committed to delivering for nature and we will take urgent action to meet our Environment Act targets. We will accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure delivery using development to fund nature recovery. Our vision is for a better planning system, one that will unlock the housing and infrastructure that this country so urgently needs while improving outcomes for nature. We will work with nature conservation organisations and the development sector to make this vision a reality.

As noble Lords have heard from my noble friend, we have ended the 14-year ban on onshore wind in England. Now development applications for onshore wind will be treated in the same way as any other proposal for renewable energy. We have made it clear that we will consult on bringing large-scale projects into the nationally significant infrastructure project regime. Our planning and infrastructure Bill is to play a key role in unlocking a new scale of delivery for housing and infrastructure across the country. It will speed up the planning process for housing and streamline the delivery of major infrastructure projects. We will act in legislation only when we can confirm to Parliament that the steps that we are taking will deliver positive environmental outcomes. At a local level, this Bill will modernise planning committees and increase local planning authorities' capacity to deliver an improved service.

[BARONESS HAYMAN OF ULLOCK]

Through our renters' rights Bill we will deliver our manifesto commitment to transform the experience of private renting, levelling the playing field between landlords and tenants by providing renters with greater security, rights and protections. We will replace Section 21 no-fault evictions with a modern tenancy system and crack down on the minority of unscrupulous landlords who exploit, mistreat or discriminate against tenants. We will also act quickly to implement the provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, providing home owners with greater rights, powers and protections over their homes. We will further reform the leasehold system, enacting remaining Law Commission recommendations relating to leaseholder enfranchisement and the right to manage, tackling unregulated and unaffordable ground rents and removing the disproportionate and draconian threat of forfeiture as a means of ensuring compliance with a lease agreement. The Government will take steps to bring the feudal leasehold system to an end, reinvigorating commonhold through a comprehensive new legal framework and banning the sale of new leasehold flats so that commonhold becomes the default tenure.

Through our English devolution Bill, we will recognise the vital role that local leaders play in our national mission to drive economic growth. We will also deliver the Government's manifesto commitment to transfer power out of Westminster into our local communities and give them more control.

During the debate there have been a number of questions, mainly around housing. For example, my noble friend Lady Warwick and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford asked specifically about social housing. The Government have pledged to deliver 1.5 million homes in this Parliament. This new development will also allow us to deliver thousands of affordable homes, including more for social rent. We will support councils and housing associations to build their capacity to deliver homes and make a greater contribution to affordable housing supply.

A number of noble Lords referred to the renters' rights Bill, and private renting was an issue of particular concern to many. The Government are determined to address the insecurity and injustice that far too many renters experience by fundamentally reforming the private rented sector and improving the quality of housing in it. The noble Lord, Lord Crisp, stressed the importance of quality and standards and their relation to health, which we take very seriously. The noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, asked about a level playing field between tenant and landlord. We want to deliver this decisively. We know that it is important to crack down on unscrupulous landlords, as I mentioned, and we are serious about doing this. We also want to end bad practices such as unfair rent increases and pitting renters against each other in bidding wars. In addition, there will be a new landlord ombudsman service with strong powers, and a private rented sector database will enhance transparency between landlords and tenants, help drive compliance and support amicable redress, reducing the need to go to court. My noble friends Lady Warwick and Lady Kennedy both have huge expertise in this area. They asked a number of very important questions, and I look forward to working with them as we move forward in this area of legislation.

Finally, my noble friend asked about the Vagrancy Act. We will deal with this as quickly as possible. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans asked about rural housing and support for rural communities, as did the noble Lord, Lord Harlech, and the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell. I assure noble Lords that, as someone who lives in a very rural part of Cumbria, I completely understand their concerns. We have rural communities at the heart of everything we do, as we do urban: this is designed for all communities to thrive, but I will of course be talking about rural matters right across other departments as part of my brief.

The planning experience, expertise and knowledge of the noble Lord, Lord Rooker, is invaluable. I certainly look forward to discussing this with him further, although I am not sure that I would want to be Planning Minister with him on my back all the time.

The noble Baroness, Lady Scott of Needham Market, asked about reforms to planning committees and local councils. We want to ensure that planning committees are fit for purpose—that is really important—that their local democratic oversight is focused on development which matters to local communities, and that local councillors and planning authorities are better equipped to do their job properly. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Mawson, for bringing his practical experience forward, which is, of course, of interest.

The noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh of Pickering, asked about SUDS and the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson of Abinger, asked about greywater. The Government fully support the use of blue-green infrastructure such as sustainable drainage systems and greywater recycling to manage surface water across existing and new communities.

The noble Baroness, Lady Miller, and the noble Lord, Lord Gascoigne, asked about the balance between development and the environment, and how you release land for development while protecting nature. Defra and the new Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government will work closely together to ensure that new developments are resilient to climate change. The noble Lord asked about the draft leasehold and commonhold reform Bill and implementing the reforms; a number of provisions come into force on 24 July, two months after Royal Assent, and the implementation of the remainder of the reforms will require a programme of secondary legislation, so we will look at the timings on that.

I was asked about local councils and funding. We will complete a new burdens assessment to ensure that there is appropriate funding, but that will take a bit of time. I listened very carefully to the concerns of the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, around tax and local authorities. He really knows what he is talking about, so it is important for any Minister to listen carefully to what he says on this. We are committed to the new burdens assessment. I am sure that he will read it with interest, but perhaps my noble friends in the Ministry of Housing should pick those issues up with him in more detail.

A number of noble Lords mentioned nutrient neutrality. We intend to implement solutions to unlock the building of much-needed homes affected by nutrient

neutrality without weakening environmental protections. We are working on that and will announce how we intend to deliver it in due course. We take it very seriously.

The noble Lord, Lord Lansley, asked about infrastructure levies. We are not looking to implement an infrastructure levy; instead, we intend to focus on reforming the existing system of developer contributions, aiming to ensure that development can continue to come forward while maximising the amount of affordable housing and infrastructure that can be provided. We will also publish the updated growth-focused National Planning Policy Framework by the end of July. The work that the noble Lord and his colleagues have done in Cambridge is very interesting, and I commend them for it.

This gracious Speech was important. We have set out our priorities for legislation that will reform and strengthen critical sectors, such as the water and rental industries, making them more accountable and sustainable in the future. I sincerely thank all noble Lords who have taken part in this constructive and insightful debate. Their perceptive contributions and dedication are important, as we move forward, to ensure that we have the best legislation that we can have. This Government are committed to uniting the country in our shared mission of national renewal. That will not happen overnight—we have debated some of those

challenges today—but we are determined and serious about unlocking growth and delivering security, prosperity and justice for everyone in this country. We very much look forward to working with all noble Lords constructively and collaboratively to achieve these aims.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow.

Oaths and Affirmations

6.05 pm

Viscount Waverley took the oath and Lord Stern of Brentford made the solemn affirmation, and both signed an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Holocaust Memorial Bill

First Reading

The Bill, having been brought from the Commons was, pursuant to the resolution of 23 October 2023, deemed to have been read a first time and referred to the Examiners; the Bill was ordered to be printed.

House adjourned at 6.07 pm.

