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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 21 October 2021

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Trade Deals: Human Rights

1. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with UK trade partners on inserting clauses on human rights into future trade deals. [903681]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I and my whole team would like to associate ourselves with the tributes to Sir David Amess that have been made this week. He was listed on the Order Paper for today's oral questions and I have no doubt that he would have championed the export opportunities for Southend, our newest city.

The Government are clear that more trade will not come at the expense of human rights. The UK will continue to show global leadership in encouraging all states to uphold international rights obligations and to hold to account those who violate those rights. By having stronger economic relationships with partners, we have the opportunity to open discussions on a range of issues.

Cat Smith: I associate myself with the Secretary of State's comments about our friend, Sir David. I welcome the Secretary of State to and congratulate her on her new position.

I note that the recent trade deal with New Zealand refers to indigenous people. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that when it comes to human rights it is important that we protect freedom of religion? Will she meet me to discuss further how UK trade deals can promote human rights and religious freedoms globally?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Lady is right: as we reach out, with our new ability to do free trade deals with our friends and allies, it is important to us to consider such important issues. For New Zealand, a chapter on indigenous peoples and their part in their nation's future progress, in respect of both economic and wider issues, was very important and we were happy to work with New Zealand to include it. I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss more fully the particular area of freedom of religion, which I agree is extremely important and which the UK continues to champion around the world.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I welcome the excellent Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box. Does she agree that free trade agreements enable us to

influence the supply chain in the countries with which we trade freely? When I chaired the all-party parliamentary group against human trafficking, the improvement of supply chains was very much appreciated and reduced the amount of human trafficking.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: My hon. Friend, who has done a great deal of work in this policy space, is absolutely right. It is important that we make sure not only that we use the power of trade to build relationships, as I said, but to give our businesses that want to work globally through supply chains the best tools and protections that they might need to ensure that they have authority with countries where the improvement of the position of the supply-chain workforce and, indeed, the protection of other human rights is critical.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): With the Government's own data showing that the vast majority of the UK public would not support a trade deal with Saudi Arabia, will the Government confirm that they will not be seeking trade agreements with countries with poor human rights records?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I have said, we have been clear that trade never comes at the expense of human rights, but we will always make use of the many relationships we have, including a very strong and long-standing relationship with Saudi Arabia, to work with partners not only to get mutual trading benefit but to help to make improvements on the issues that we consider to be important.

British Farmers: Global Exports

2. **Dr Neil Hudson** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to help increase global export opportunities for British farmers. [903682]

4. **Simon Baynes** (Clwyd South) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to help increase global export opportunities for British farmers. [903684]

10. **Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to help increase global export opportunities for British farmers. [903690]

16. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to help increase global export opportunities for British farmers. [903703]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Our trade agreements are lowering tariffs and unlocking new opportunities for food exporters and the farmers that supply them. The Department for International Trade supports such businesses to capitalise on those opportunities, expand into new markets and sell fantastic British produce overseas.

Dr Hudson: Our fantastic farmers in Cumbria and the wider UK produce world-class food with the highest animal welfare and environmental standards. We should be very proud of that—we can be a beacon to the rest of the world. What reassurances can my right hon. Friend give to the farmers in Penrith and The Border and throughout the UK that those high standards will be upheld in future trade deals, and that meaningful parliamentary scrutiny will be possible, not least through the urgent establishment of the new Trade and Agriculture Commission?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Just as the Cumbrian farmers are doing well, may I say how proud I am of my Northumbrian farmers who, just across the way, are similarly producing some of the finest food in the world? My hon. Friend is quite right: the new Trade and Agriculture Commission will play an important role in scrutinising trade agreements after signature. Applications are being considered and we hope to be able to announce the membership and the details very shortly. The commission will be in place to scrutinise, first of all, the free trade agreement with Australia when we sign it.

Simon Baynes: Export markets are increasing for Welsh farmers as we look to the US market for lamb opening up once more. There is also the export success of farms in my constituency of Clwyd South, such as Knolton farmhouse cheese and the increased beef exports by the Rhug estate. Will my right hon. Friend redouble her efforts to ensure that future trade deals open up even more global markets for Welsh and UK farmers?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Wales produces some of the UK's most iconic food products and we have already unlocked new markets to increase opportunities—for example, gaining access for UK lamb, poultry and beef to Japan. We want to unlock even more opportunities for Welsh farmers and exporters and we will be working closely with the Welsh farming industry as we seek to do so.

David Duguid: On behalf of my constituent, Irene Fowlie, may I thank the Department, along with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for its help in facilitating the export of high-quality pedigree Essie Suffolk sheep to Georgia earlier this year? May I ask my right hon. Friend, whom I welcome to her new role, how we can improve access to new export routes for other high-quality agricultural produce, particularly from Scotland?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: My hon. Friend is a great champion of all the wonderful produce coming out of Scotland and I thank him for his continued efforts. He will be pleased to know that we launched the export support service on 1 October, which will be there to help existing and potentially new exporters with some of those new markets. We have also established a new team in Edinburgh, which is building great networks, and we are committed to enhancing our support for businesses across Scotland to help us showcase the amazing goods and services from every corner of that nation.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The House will be aware of the problems facing UK pig farmers; pigs are sadly being culled on farms, partly because of a shortage of labour, but also because of the closure of markets to China. Other European countries have managed to reopen those markets, but the UK has signally failed to do so. What is the Secretary of State doing to address that diplomatic failure?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I will happily pick that up and make sure that the team from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs gives the hon. Gentleman the most up-to-date information on those

pork markets, but we continue to work with all our farmers to make sure that they are able to move their goods to new markets.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Let me begin by welcoming the Secretary of State to her new role. May I associate myself with the remarks that she made about the late David Amess. He was an enthusiastic and lively participant in International Trade questions, as he was with everything that he turned his mind to.

I also look forward to studying the Secretary of State's response to the Trade and Agriculture Commission report, which I have just learned will be released with a written ministerial statement later today.

On page 54 of the International Trade Department's June 2020 paper on the strategic approach to free trade with New Zealand, it forecast that an agreement along the lines that I understand the Government announced last night will cause

"a reduction in output and employment...in the UK agriculture sector."

Does that remain the Secretary of State's forecast for the impact of last night's deal?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I will be making an oral statement to the House shortly and I am sure that we all look forward to discussing this issue in more detail. I am very confident that the deal that we struck will provide the opportunity for our wonderful food producers to continue to sell their goods across the world, and, as we make more trade deals, create new markets for them.

Emily Thornberry: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer, but it does rather illustrate why we need a new Trade and Agriculture Commission to provide an independent assessment. After all, last November, the previous Secretary of State told the National Farmers' Union in Wales:

"We have no intention of ever striking a deal that doesn't benefit farmers, but we have provided checks and balances in the form of the Trade and Agriculture Commission."

Can the Secretary of State confirm that the new TAC will be asked to examine the proposed deals with Australia and New Zealand and tell us simply whether these deals benefit our farmers?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The new TAC will be charged with some very clear direction, and given independence for it to be able to scrutinise both the Australian and New Zealand trade deals and all the other trade deals that we are looking to strike in the months and years ahead.

Free Trade Agreements

3. **Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con):** What recent progress her Department has made on securing free trade agreements with countries around the world.

[903683]

13. **Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** What recent progress her Department has made on securing free trade agreements with countries around the world.

[903697]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): We now have trade deals with 68 countries around the world, plus the EU, covering trade worth £744 billion last year.

Alexander Stafford: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the trade deals we have secured, especially those with Commonwealth partners—such as the excellent deals with Australia and, more recently, New Zealand—are a shining example of global Britain in action, and that they are opening up fantastic opportunities for British businesses and consumers, be they in Rother Valley or across our great country?

Penny Mordaunt: Global Britain means using our expertise, resources, talents and values as a force for good in the world, and furthering not just our interests, but the interests of the whole of humanity. My hon. Friend's part of the world is helping us to do that; last year, Yorkshire and the Humber exported more than £240 million-worth of goods to Australia alone. I want those businesses in his constituency to benefit from the removal of tariffs.

Mark Pawsey: I very much welcome the trade deals that the Government have secured, particularly the most recent one with New Zealand, but trade deals are a first step and it is now for British businesses to take advantage of them. Does the Minister agree that the role of skilled, professional salespeople with business-to-business selling skills will be critical to ensuring that we get the projected value from these deals, and that we need to give those people every support?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is right, and he is doing his damndest to make sure that Rugby is at the front of the queue in that respect. To support his businesses, we are delivering an export promotion campaign that positions exporting as a route to growth, prosperity and job creation. The campaign will encourage businesses to seize the opportunities from trade deals, while directing them to our new export support services.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I also welcome the Minister for Trade Policy, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), to her new role.

I have already mentioned the forecast that the deal with New Zealand will cost jobs in our farming communities. Has the Minister had a chance to read that? I also want to ask her about exports and growth. Is it correct, as her Department says on page 54 of the document, that under the terms of the deal New Zealand's exports to the UK will increase by five times as much as UK exports to New Zealand, and that, as it says on page 58, New Zealand's GDP will grow by half a billion pounds while the UK's GDP will not increase by a single penny? Will the Minister tell us whether those figures are right?

Penny Mordaunt: Missing from the right hon. Lady's question was any timeframe. The Opposition need to appreciate that we are building and increasing these markets. Over time, the numbers will go up, because we have given our businesses and farmers the opportunity to do that, and because we have faith in those businesses and farmers to seize those opportunities that we give them. I hope that the right hon. Lady and her Opposition colleagues will be cheerleaders in that respect.

Emily Thornberry: I am just reading the figures from the Minister's Department and there is a real problem: this is now the third Asia-Pacific agreement in a row—Japan, Australia and now New Zealand—where more than 80% of the growth in trade projected by her own Department has gone to exporters in those other countries and less than 20% has gone to exporters in the UK. The Government say that they are tilting to Asia. I have to say, I think that Asia is taking us to the cleaners. While the Minister is still relatively new, will she sit down with her new boss and tell the Department that enough is enough—that we need trade deals that deliver for Britain, and we need jobs, exports and growth?

Penny Mordaunt: Nine trillion pounds—that is what these deals, and ultimately the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, will mean to this country. Yes, we have three deals, and we are going to get more. That is what we want to do. We are going to grow these markets. That is the whole point of our leaving the EU and formulating this plan for global Britain. These deals will increase growth and prosperity in this country, which will fund everything that matters to all Members of this House.

Export of Financial Services

5. **Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to increase the export of British financial services. [903685]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mike Freer): My hon. Friend will know that the UK is a global financial services hub. The Government's ambition is to champion this success and promote further growth in financial services through supporting UK businesses to set up shop in markets around the world and striking ambitious progressive trade agreements to open up new markets for our financial services exporters.

Gareth Davies: We are already one of the world's largest net exporters of financial services, but does my hon. Friend agree that if we are to expand financial services trade even further, we need the regulator to be as energetic and committed as this Government are to expanding that trade?

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. As someone who has come from a financial services background, I have felt the regulator's hand on my shoulder, so I do understand that regulation can be good, but equally our regulators need to be entirely in tune with our export policy. My colleagues in the Treasury who lead on regulation will be ensuring that our regulator works closely with our export strategy. Specifically, I refer my hon. Friend to some of the annexes particularly in our trade deal with Japan where the benefits of that work can already be seen.

Trade Negotiations: Welsh Government

6. **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): What recent discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on her Department's ongoing trade negotiations. [903686]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): The Department for International Trade has established structures to engage very constructively with devolved Administrations across the United Kingdom, including the Welsh Government. I and my fellow Ministers will be speaking with Welsh Government counterparts in due course, as we always have done.

Jonathan Edwards: The Welsh Government, Hybu Cig Cymru and the farmers unions have all expressed concerns about the direction of UK trade policy, especially with regard to food—fears, I suspect, that will be heightened by today’s announcement about the deal with New Zealand. On the eve of COP26, can the Minister explain the environmental sense of undercutting domestic food production with imports from the other side of the world?

Mr Jayawardena: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman slightly misses the point about trade. The opportunity for trade is for us to be able to sell all over the world too. The Welsh farmers, along with British farmers across our country, I am sure, will be seeking these opportunities to trade not only with the 68 countries around the world with whom we have trade deals, plus the EU, but more to come—with the Gulf, with India, and much more in future. In respect of the opportunities regarding our friends in New Zealand and Australia, they sell much more of their products to Asia, where prices are higher, so our farmers need not be concerned.

UK Trade with the EU

7. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of trends in the level of UK trade with the EU. [903687]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): Covid has had a huge negative impact on global supply chains and trade in both goods and services.

Alex Cunningham: It is interesting that Ministers are talking about growing trade when it is actually going in the other direction. Trade with Germany is worth eight times our trade with Australia, so we must all be concerned to hear that UK exports to Germany are down by 11% so far this year. We have also fallen outside Germany’s top 10 trading partners for the first time in 71 years. The Minister must share these concerns, so what is she going to do about it?

Penny Mordaunt: UK trade in goods with the EU has been steadily increasing this year and is now above average levels for 2020, and exports are increasing faster than imports. However, we recognise that there are difficulties, which is why, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we have stood up the export support service, which launched on 1 October. That is primarily focused on trade with the EU, but will, over time, be expanded to rest of world. There will be a briefing for all parliamentary staff on the export support service, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman from my own constituents’ experience that it is already making a difference.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Last month, the previous Secretary of State said that it had been a mistake to focus

“too much on trade with the EU despite the richest opportunities being in the Asia-Pacific.”

Are the Government now making the reverse mistake by focusing too much on small gains in Asia despite the far bigger losses we are facing in Europe?

Penny Mordaunt: The issue is that as part of the EU we had to focus on trade with the EU and we were hampered in setting our own agreements and policies with the rest of the world. Now we can trade with the rest of the world as well as the EU. We have had difficulties with covid and with all sorts of things that global trade has had to cope with, but we will recover, as will the rest of the world. When the numbers start going the right way, as they already are, and exceed previous years, I hope that Opposition Members will start to talk this country up rather than down.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): It is fantastic that the UK has already agreed trade deals with almost 70 countries, plus the EU, that accounted for £744 billion-worth of UK bilateral trade in 2020. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is firm evidence of our striking out into the world and seizing the new opportunities that we now have ahead of us outside of the EU that will benefit Teesside businesses in the long run?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work he is doing to ensure that businesses can capitalise on these new opportunities. We need to give them the tools to do the job and help them to break into new markets, but the opportunities are immense, and I thank all colleagues who are helping us to achieve those ambitions and supporting businesses, particularly small businesses, in their constituencies.

Trade Deals: Environmental Standards

8. **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with UK trade partners on inserting clauses on environmental standards into future trade deals. [903688]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK is seeking ambitious environmental provisions in all future trade deals, including those which preserve our high levels of environmental protection and ensure our trade and environment policies are mutually supportive. Negotiations, including with both Australia and New Zealand, are progressing and the UK is also preparing for the next phase of negotiations, including with India, Mexico and Canada.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Last week, a leaked document drawn up by departmental officials revealed that it was the Government’s policy to prioritise economic growth over climate protection in the UK’s trade deals. If the Minister says that is not a true reflection of the Department’s negotiating priorities, can she explain why it was written by departmental officials and distributed across Whitehall just days ago?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Our ambitious trade deal with Australia, for instance, includes a substantive article that affirms both parties’ commitments to address climate change, making clear our commitments mutually to the

United Nations framework convention on climate change, the Paris agreement and the achievement of all those goals. We will continue to have that and more detail as we make new trade deals.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I add my welcome to the Secretary of State. She was asked in the previous question about a leaked document, which suggests that economic growth is a higher priority for this Government in trade negotiations than climate protection. I know that must be embarrassing for her, given that the Government are supposed to be showing leadership in addressing the climate crisis ahead of COP26, but she can confirm the Government's priority once and for all by making a definitive statement now about whether the Government and her Department will rule out trade deals with countries such as Brazil and Malaysia so long as they continue to destroy their rainforests. Will she make that commitment today?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Economic growth and the UK's world-leading commitment to the climate challenges that the planet faces are not mutually exclusive; they go hand in hand. The environment and climate change will continue to be a key priority for the UK. Our ambition and leadership in that and helping our UK businesses that are driving the green agenda and providing the clean technologies of the future will be a critical part of making sure that our trade deals are very good for those British producers.

Trade Envoys

9. **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): What progress her Department's newly appointed trade envoys have made on promoting British exports and investment. [903689]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mike Freer): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Iceland and Norway. Our new trade envoys are strengthening commercial ties in their designated markets and assisting UK businesses to take full advantage of opportunities arising from our global trade and investment agenda.

Felicity Buchan: I was delighted to be appointed the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Norway and Iceland, following the signing of free trade agreements with those countries. Can my hon. Friend update the House as to how his Department is looking to deepen the relationship between the UK and Norway and Iceland?

Mike Freer: I am pleased to say that on 8 July, the UK signed the new, improved trade deal with Norway and Iceland. It is the most advanced trade deal that both countries have ever signed, with gold-stamped provisions in digital trade, mobile roaming and business travel. It will cut tariffs and support jobs in every corner of our country, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to exploit those opportunities.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I also welcome the ministerial team to their place, and I echo the comments over the tragic loss of our parliamentary friend and colleague, Sir David Amess. It was a senseless act.

Far from promoting Scottish exports, new documents from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs show that for the period ending June 2021, Scottish exports had decreased by 14% from the previous year. That is not a covid blip, but a result of the UK Government's decisions over Brexit. The report contains damning charts highlighting the cliff edge that Scottish trade is being pushed over. It is long-term economic vandalism. All the tiny free trade agreements that the Government are willing to sell out for cannot move the dial on the shortfall. Will the Government apologise to Scottish businesses and offer compensation?

Mike Freer: I have to say this is week six in the role, so I will admit to being rather new to some of the challenges, but I did think—[*Interruption.*] At least be gentle with me today. I did think that the Scottish Government had their own exports Department—[*Interruption.*] Hang on a minute. My understanding of my brief is that one of my roles is to work closely with the Scottish Government on their exports policies. If the hon. Gentleman will let me work with the Administration and our new office that we have opened to boost co-operation and exports from Scotland, that should address the problem. I accept his criticism, but ask him to allow me some time to work with him and his colleagues so we can reverse that trend.

Drew Hendry: I think—

Mr Speaker: Order. Can we try to aim it through the Chair, rather than going to each other?

Drew Hendry: Mr Speaker, I think anybody listening to that would be a bit stunned. I will cut the Minister some slack for being new in the job, but not knowing the basics is something he will have to polish up on. That answer is simply unacceptable to businesses pushed into crisis by this Government.

Let us take food and drink as an example. Food and drink manufacture is twice as important to the Scottish economy as to that of the UK as a whole, and the food and drink export trade is four times as important to the Scottish economy. Once again, Scottish interests are being treated as expendable.

The UK Government have failed to look for solutions to the Brexit trading barriers that are inflicting serious and lasting harm on Scotland. I have an offer for the new Minister: will he hold immediate cross-party talks to find new measures and solutions, or will he once again simply prove that the only way to protect Scotland's interest is through independence?

Mike Freer: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the food and drink sector across the whole of the UK, and in Scotland, is a priority for this team. I can honestly tell him that I am more than happy to sit down with him and his colleagues to work through some of the challenges that we both share, but I also want him to recognise the opportunities that our new trade deals will offer. When we deliver on those trade opportunities, I hope he will give credit to the UK Government.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): As the recently appointed trade envoy to Brazil, it would be remiss of me not to point out just one of the huge opportunities we have in building a positive relationship with Brazil. At 212 million, its population is seven times the combined populations of New Zealand and Australia. Some 65 million

people in Brazil do not have a bank account. To build on the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies), does the Minister agree that financial services represent a fantastic opportunity, not just for this country but to support Brazil in bringing in its own revenues, as it should be?

Mr Speaker: I am going to be generous—I think it was stretching the original question—but the Minister will pick it up.

Mike Freer: Financial services are a huge part of the UK economy. We recognise that they are a huge opportunity for this country to work with our partners, especially Brazil, to ensure that we can share the benefits and expertise that we have with them.

UK Pork: Trade with China

11. **Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the potential effect on trade of the suspension of export licences for UK pork processing plants trading with China. [903694]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): I am grateful for the question. This issue has affected pork exporters in many countries. To my knowledge, three British businesses are affected. In the 12 months to August 2021, British pig meat exports to China decreased by 3,642 tonnes, which is down 2.1%. The value of pig meat exported to China over the same period increased by £12.6 million, however, which is up 4.6%.

Dave Doogan: I am afraid it does appear that almost every single UK Government Department is trying to undermine the UK pig sector, and nowhere is that more keenly felt than in Brechin in my constituency. The Secretary of State said earlier to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) that DEFRA will be supplying us with an answer to the China exports crisis. DEFRA is impotent; this is a trade issue. What is the Department for International Trade going to do about the crisis in exports to China?

Mr Jayawardena: I appreciate the strength of the hon. Member's conviction in this area, but I come back to the core answer, which is that Her Majesty's Government will work in every possible way we can to resolve such issues. Ministers have raised this issue with Chinese counterparts, and this Department continues to press the Chinese authorities for a swift resolution. We are working very closely with affected British pork processing plants. I would just make the point to him that we are very clear-eyed on our trade relationship with China. We have no plans to negotiate a trade deal, but we believe that more trade with our trading partners around the world, including China, is important, so we are working very closely on this.

Free Trade Agreement: India

12. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent progress her Department has made on securing a free trade agreement with India. [903695]

15. **Shaun Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Con): What recent progress her Department has made on securing a free trade agreement with India. [903701]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I met my Indian counterpart, Minister Goyal, at the G20 in Italy last week to discuss final preparations for the launch of negotiations before the end of this year. My officials have concluded a series of bilateral working groups with Indian colleagues, and we will publish our negotiating aims, the response to the public consultation and an economic assessment of the FTA in the coming weeks.

Bob Blackman: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her new job. The EU has been trying, unsuccessfully, to do a trade deal with India for 24 years, but we have an advantage. India is the third biggest investor in the UK, and we used to be the third biggest investor in India, but we have slipped down the league table. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that, now that we are free from the shackles of Brussels, we have the ideal opportunity to negotiate a free trade deal, which would be good for our two great countries?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for his passionate presentation. I know about his relationship with India, and I hope very much that we will be able to harness all his knowledge and passion as we pull this together. We are in the final phase of preparations for the launch of negotiations very shortly, and I look forward to updating the House on our negotiating aims very soon.

Shaun Bailey: Businesses in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton are excited about the prospect of a trade deal with India. Can I ask my right hon. Friend what work she is doing with businesses with existing links to India to ensure that we can really leverage those connections and make sure that areas such as the Black Country—which I know my right hon. Friend is going to visit very soon to see some of those businesses—make the most out of a trade deal with India?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend, and I am always happy to stop in and meet some of the amazing businesses in his constituency, for which he is such a great champion. All UK sectors and regions stand to benefit from a trade deal with India, improving access to one of the fastest growing and most dynamic markets in the world. Its GDP is predicted to grow by 8.5% next year and imports into the UK by 8.2%. I want to make sure that, as the trade deal comes together, we are providing both the tools and the liberalising opportunities for all our great businesses.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): India, like many other countries, is lagging on vaccination—fewer than half there have had their first jab—so does the Secretary of State support her US counterpart's call for a temporary waiver of the patents on covid vaccines?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Member's question is timely. The G7 trade talks will be taking place tomorrow here in London, and that question and many of the issues—we will be discussing those questions at the WTO in December—will be raised. I am sure he will be pleased to see the communiqué outcomes.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I welcome the Secretary of State to her place and wish her well? I endorse the need for a trade agreement with India, but, as the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) said earlier, I caution, in relation to any trade agreement, about the rights of those of a different religious persuasion, including those of a Christian persuasion. I met the high commissioner for India in Northern Ireland some four weeks ago, and pushed the point with her about how important it is, within a trade agreement, to have freedom of religious belief for all. Unfortunately, that does not happen in India. When the Secretary of State has talks with the Indian Government about a trade agreement will she ensure that it benefits those with different religious beliefs and other persecuted minorities?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I said to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), I am happy to discuss that area. As colleagues will be aware, the FCDO is always at the forefront of such discussions, ensuring that where we have lines of communication we are robust and firm friends on issues that we consider to be values, and that we continue to trade with others and have good relationships. We will continue to work in that area.

Trade Strategy: Climate Change

14. **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to include climate change in its global trade strategy. [903699]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Department for International Trade is pursuing a range of objectives to put climate and environment at the centre of our departmental ambitions, and we are committed to maximising the economic value of the net zero transition. In addition, UK Export Finance recently published its climate change strategy, setting out its support for green exports and its commitment to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Duncan Baker: Climate change continues to be the dominant issue that affects people and Governments all over the world, and COP26 needs to show that it has co-ordinated efforts with countries that can help. Would my right hon. Friend ever consider trade sanctions against countries that wilfully ignore their responsibilities, and would a carbon border adjustment be a mechanism she would consider?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As hosts of COP26 and the G7 this year we are determined to promote transformational actions to deliver on the Paris agreement. The UK is building international consensus for ambitious collective action on mitigating those emissions, and promoting policies such as carbon pricing to ensure that private sector incentives are aligned with our goals for an ambitious outcome at COP26. From a trade perspective, any policy option we pursue should be market oriented, World Trade Organisation compliant, evidence based, proportionate, and forward looking.

Topical Questions

T1. [903636] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Last week I attended the G20 trade and investment ministerial meeting, where I made the case for fair and open markets, ahead of the upcoming meeting of the World Trade Organisation. Tomorrow I will be hosting the G7 trade Ministers meeting, where I will make that case again. This week the UK hosted the first global investment summit, where £9.7 billion of investment was secured. Those deals will support green growth and create more than 30,000 jobs across the country. That will deliver for families, workers and businesses across Britain, and set the stage for greater co-operation between the UK Government and businesses around the world on global challenges such as digital trade and climate change. Last night we secured our agreement in principle with New Zealand for our free trade agreement. Trade is a vital part of our plan to level up our country, slashing costs and red tape for exporters, building new trade routes for our services companies, and refocusing Britain on the dynamic economies of Asia-Pacific. With COP26 fast approaching, I will continue to drive forward the Prime Minister's 10-point plan, using our global networks to drive up green business ambitions, and attracting investment to the UK's green sectors.

Rachael Maskell: Every mile that every product travels grows its carbon footprint, and the Secretary of State has not denied her Department's leaked document that states that it prioritises economic growth over climate protection. How will she make representation at COP26 when we hear that we are way off our 1.5 °C target, and place the climate emergency—and it is an emergency—at the top of her priorities, as opposed to being something she does not really believe in?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I said earlier, economic growth and tackling the challenge of climate change go hand in hand. Finding solutions to those polluting methods of travel is a key area where the UK is leading with innovative businesses, and coming up with solutions regarding aviation fuel, or looking at clean shipping. We have brought international aviation and shipping challenges into carbon budget 6, and we are leading the way in ensuring that, economically as well as being part of the planet's requirements, we find solutions that mean we can continue to trade, ensuring that those journeys involve clean energy users.

T2. [903637] **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I have a number of livestock, cattle and sheep farmers in my beautiful Hastings and Rye constituency in East Sussex, of which I am very proud. On global export opportunities for my farmers, what steps is my right hon. Friend taking to differentiate UK lamb or beef from that from other parts of the world, for example by establishing a UK brand? Is she developing an export strategy specifically for that purpose?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Our fantastic beef and lamb are world renowned for high welfare and environmental standards, and indeed for excellent flavour. The cross-Government GREAT Britain and Northern Ireland campaign gives global brand recognition to the UK's offer, including our world-class food and drink, which we are proud to promote around the world. Our agricultural

food and drink Open Doors campaign, launched earlier this year, is helping UK agribusinesses seize the opportunities presented by our new trade agreements.

T3. [903638] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her place and the two new Ministers to the team. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment yesterday to bringing forward the long-overdue online harms Bill. The Secretary of State will know that I have spent many years campaigning on that Bill and trying to ensure that it is brought forward in better time. I know that Ministers will agree that there can be no loopholes in our trade agreements when it comes to the liability of online service providers. Have Ministers commissioned legal advice on the compatibility of the draft online safety legislation with chapter 14 of the provisions of the trans-Pacific partnership in relation to electronic commerce? We really cannot allow platforms to get away from culpability for not tackling the abuses that everyone receives through their platforms.

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): I thank the hon. Gentleman for the work that he has done in this area. Clearly, in addition to being compatible with UK law, we have an ambition that the UK will be the safest place in the world to do business. In addition to the legal advice that we commission, we are consulting widely with stakeholders in this sector and in other sectors that are emerging markets. We want to ensure that we are able to expand digital services but also to support the values that need to underpin that sector if it is going to thrive and be successful.

T5. [903640] **Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): One of the UK's greatest exports is Stoke-on-Trent's world-leading ceramics, which I am sure my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has heard much about from her newly appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). Ceramics manufacturers in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke are delighted that our new free trade agreement with Australia will bring opportunities to export more of our outstanding products. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a fantastic boost for this iconic British industry and the world capital of ceramics, Stoke-on-Trent?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for being such a champion for his constituency and for this sector in particular. He is right that these deals will make it less costly and much easier to sell those iconic products. I know that he will be encouraging pottery firms in his constituency to ship to Australia and New Zealand, benefiting from the removal of the 5% tariff.

T4. [903639] **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): During recess, I visited a constituent on his farm. We discussed how farmers want a level playing field when it comes to trade, and their concerns about the Government's trade agreements undercutting UK food standards. Will the proposed deal with Australia reduce tariffs on meat produced using growth-promoting antibiotics, which UK farmers are banned from using? If so, how is it consistent with the repeated promises made to our farmers that they would not be undermined by food produced to lower standards than they are required to meet?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): We have been crystal clear on this. We will not compromise our high environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards. That is non-negotiable.

T6. [903641] **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): The port of Southampton is one of the busiest container ports in the UK. Between 80% and 90% of containers arriving at the port are from the far east. Now that we are free to negotiate and sign our own trade deals, will my right hon. Friend update the House on what progress she has made on securing deals with countries in the far east and how that will help to ensure that the port of Southampton thrives into the future?

Penny Mordaunt: The agreement in principle that we have just secured with New Zealand, in addition to being good in itself, helps pave the way towards the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, which will be hugely beneficial to my hon. Friend's constituency. I thank him for the work that he has been doing in championing the Solent freeport, which will benefit Southampton but also another port just slightly further along the coast in which I have more than a passing interest.

T8. [903644] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): The former Secretary of State allowed the steel sector an additional year to appeal against the Trade Remedies Authority's wrong-headed recommendations to remove safeguards. Do current Ministers share the sector's concerns that without an extension of the safeguards, we risk becoming a magnet for imported steel, putting at risk thousands of high-paid, high-skilled jobs and millions of pounds of economic value?

Mr Jayawardena: We took a very careful and measured approach to this difficult issue. We are determined to back the steel sector, but we will do so in a WTO-compliant way. The Trade Remedies Authority is working very hard on this issue.

T7. [903642] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): With almost all my immediate family living in New Zealand and as a regular visitor there in more normal times, may I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the work she has done to secure the free trade agreement, and provide my assurance that there is a market there for British businesses that is very keen to grow? How, during the course of the development of free trade agreements, do she and her Department engage with the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, which are also very keen to benefit from the advantages of our new-found freedoms now we are no longer in the EU?

Mr Jayawardena: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all that he says. He is right that we should be ambitious not only for the United Kingdom herself, but for the Crown dependencies. The Crown dependencies are an important part of our family and the Department for International Trade has developed a very strong working relationship with both officials and Ministers from their Governments. They are consulted prior to the launching of FTAs and consistently engage with us as the agreements progress towards signature and implementation.

T9. [903645] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): Ministers have repeatedly told this House that trade does not need to come at the expense of human rights, yet in Colombia this year alone 43 people were killed by police during protests in April and May. More than 100 social leaders have been murdered and former FARC combatants continue to be targeted at an appalling rate. Does the Secretary of State not agree that those are grounds to follow recent calls from Colombian trade unions and the TUC to suspend Colombia's membership of the UK-Andean trade agreement by invoking its human rights clause?

Mr Jayawardena: We will always look very closely at any abuses of rights and responsibilities around the world. The agreement the hon. Lady refers to is based on an EU agreement, which provided us and businesses across the country with continuity. It is important that we ensure we balance the objectives across our trade agreements to deliver benefits for British businesses. I know that British businesses across the north-east value greatly that agreement.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What progress has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the team made on increasing trade with Israel, our good friend and partner, particularly in the pharmaceutical and high-tech industries?

Mr Jayawardena: Trade with Israel is going from strength to strength. My hon. Friend is right to raise the opportunities in tech in particular for the future. We are probing and scoping for better and deeper trade relations, including a future revised trade agreement that will allow us to do much more in the years ahead.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Because of poorly negotiated ideology-driven free trade deals, farmers will have no choice, if their businesses are to survive, but to resort to more intensive, less climate-friendly farming to compete with cheaper imports from such places as Australia—pretty shameful in the year that the UK hosts COP. Has the Department for International Trade, alongside colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, analysed how this shift will impact on local pollution levels and our wider greenhouse gas footprint?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear that very pessimistic question. I do not think our farmers in the UK are going to do that at all. I think they care deeply about animal welfare and I think they care deeply about the environment. I look forward to the press release from the Scottish Government championing the benefits to Scottish businesses that come from the New Zealand trade deal that we talked through with them yesterday. They are considerable and they ought to start talking up their businesses, their farmers and their food and drink sector, rather than doing it down.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): May I first welcome the new ministerial team and of course the new parliamentary private secretaries, who I am sure will do as good a job as the previous ones? [Laughter.] I welcome the announcement today of an agreement in principle on the free trade deal with New Zealand. Can my right hon. Friend please confirm that the new free

trade deals, such as the one that has been agreed today, are good for consumers and also open up export markets for our farmers?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for his efforts when he was a PPS, sitting behind the previous team, and I know that he will continue to champion all that is good and exciting and the future benefit for our businesses as we look forward to future trade deals. The opportunities to slash tariffs, create new markets and build preferential relationships with our friends and allies through new trade deals will continue to be something that we see our businesses champion and come to talk to us about. I challenge all colleagues to share with us, as the team, the areas of interest for their businesses and constituencies, so that we know that we are pushing in all those areas—many of which we have discussed today—that are important to our great UK businesses.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Sir David Amess was due to ask a question today and I suspect that, as chair of the all-party British-Maldives parliamentary group, he would have reiterated previous questions about support for the very sustainable fishing industry there. As part of the all-party group on small island developing states, which includes the Maldives, I therefore feel honour-bound to pursue that cause on his behalf. Why are we requiring 20% import tariffs on tuna from the Maldives? It is a highly sustainable sector and other SIDS do not have the same tariffs. What progress is being made on negotiating an economic partnership agreement or finding some other way to remove this unfair barrier?

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Lady rightly refers to our late colleague, Sir David Amess, and his brilliance in championing the issues of people not only across our country, but across the world. His representations on behalf of the Maldives remain firmly lodged in my mind. Along with the Secretary of State, I will certainly continue to be committed to working with our friends and allies across the Commonwealth, including in the Maldives. The Maldives does not benefit from an agreement because the EU had not secured an agreement with the Maldives. I am looking very closely at what we can do now that we have taken back control of our trade policy—[*Interruption.*] Although Opposition Members do not wish to listen to my answer, I refer to my answer from the last International Trade questions, when I said that we would look very closely at what we could do in that regard.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): With nearly 70 free trade deals now signed and the fact that the British people voted to leave political union with the European Union, does the Secretary of State agree that Opposition Members would have kept us in the single market and in the customs union, and we would not have been able to negotiate the free trade deals that we now have around the country, including the one announced with New Zealand? This now puts us in pole position to be the global leader that we are.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I could not have put it better myself.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): As we have heard, human rights are too often forgotten in our trade deals. I believe that the Foreign Secretary is now

courting Saudi Arabia even more, to name just one of the countries that has a dubious record. When will the Government start getting serious about human rights and make it clear to countries around the world that until they get their human rights records sorted out, they are not going to get trade deals with the UK?

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to value trade around the world as a force for good. By having strong economic relationships, we can have honest and open conversations with trading partners, and we will continue to do so. In the Gulf, we have the opportunity to trade with a market of 50 million people, 30 million of whom, I believe, are in Saudi Arabia. The opportunities for trade are great and we will not let that sentiment from the Labour party get in the way of more trade for the benefit of our people. At the same time, if he had listened to the Secretary of State earlier, he would have heard that more trade will never come at the expense of our values.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): The UK is already one of the most attractive investment destinations in the world and this investment is vital to levelling up the country, particularly investment in new technologies and green innovation. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she is working to encourage this type of investment to help us to progress to net zero emissions and deliver on the Prime Minister's excellent 10-point plan?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Absolutely. The Global Investment Summit, which we hosted earlier this week in London, saw 200 of the world's most important investors coming to London to hear how they could be part of the UK's world leadership in green technologies; £6 billion of investment was committed to offshore wind and millions to many, many different new technologies.

We had the opportunity to showcase many of the UK's leading future solutions to our green challenge and we look forward to continuing to increase that inward investment to help us to deliver them.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Will the Department agree to consider evidence gathered by the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into carbon border taxes or, better still, initiate an inquiry of its own?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: This is an important area of policy. I would be very happy to sit down and discuss the Committee's findings. It will continue to be a key area post COP26 as through the UNFCCC system we try to find something that can work across the planet, to make sure that we can be as effective as possible in using carbon pricing to help drive the green solutions that we all need.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the news that she has begun discussions on a new export and investment partnership between the UK and Italy. Does she agree that enhancing our bilateral relationship with Italy will boost export opportunities and investment promotion for our businesses?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting an important G20 discussion that I had last week with the Italian Trade Minister. We launched a UK-Italy dialogue, which will be an opportunity to continue to grow the already substantial £14 billion in exports that we have with Italy and the £30 billion in overall bilateral trade so that we can build those relationships with one of our close European allies. We look to do more in bilateral relationships with many of our European neighbours.

Speaker's Statement

10.30 am

Mr Speaker: The House will be aware that today we are in the unusual situation of having an urgent question and a statement on the same subject, covid-19. I want to explain why this is the case.

The Government decide whether to make a statement; I decide whether to grant an urgent question. I have repeatedly made it clear that the Government should make important announcements in this House first. Once again, however, an important announcement was made by the Department of Health and Social Care to the media yesterday before being made to this House. This is not acceptable.

As I have warned the Government, in those circumstances I will allow the House the earliest opportunity to hear from a Minister, in this case via an urgent question. If they want to avoid a similar situation in future, all the Government have to do is make sure that announcements are made here first, not to the media.

I will make one further point. I understand that yesterday the Secretary of State made an announcement not just about important policy matters, but setting out his views about how Members should behave in this Chamber—that is to say, whether they should wear masks. That only strengthens the case that he should come here. If he wants to talk about this House, he should not do it from Downing Street; he should do it to the Members he is talking to.

I know that it is a sensitive day because of our great colleague James Brokenshire's funeral—I understand that—but last night we put on an emergency statement: the Home Secretary came to me and we put it on. I will work with any Secretary of State or any Minister to avoid the embarrassing situation in which they think it more appropriate to brief the media than brief this House. It will not happen; if it does, we will see more urgent questions, and Government business will get blocked. That is not what I want. I want us to work together, but I want due respect for Members elected to this Chamber. I hope that that only strengthens the case that in future we get it right and that all comments should be made here before being made anywhere else.

I do feel sorry, because this is not aimed at the Minister—far from it. It is a reminder, and I am sure she will take it back to the Secretary of State: please remember that we are all elected here, not in the corridors of Downing Street or on the front doorstep.

Covid-19: Government Response

10.33 am

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make a statement on the Government's response to covid-19.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for his question and for the opportunity to answer questions from across the House in addition to my oral statement later this morning. Before I do so, I want to underline our commitment to keeping the House informed.

Yesterday's announcement on the procurement of new antiviral treatments was made to Parliament via a written ministerial statement. The purpose of the Secretary of State's press conference was to appeal directly to the public to come forward for their vaccines, including the 4.7 million people over the age of 18 in England who have not accepted the vaccine. We need those who are eligible to do so to take up the offer of a booster jab as we pursue plan A to its full extent.

Jonathan Ashworth: I thank the Minister for that answer.

Yesterday the Secretary of State said that the pressures on the NHS were sustainable, but we are seeing ambulances backed up outside hospitals, patients waiting hour upon hour in A&E, cancer operations cancelled, and NHS staff exhausted. Has there ever been, in the history of the NHS, a more complacent attitude on the part of a Secretary of State as we head into winter? Yesterday the Secretary of State refused to trigger plan B. Can the Minister tell us what is the criterion for triggering it?

Newspapers report today that a plan C—no household mixing—is being considered: a lockdown by the back door. When the Business Secretary ruled out a lockdown yesterday, was that just another example of his making things up as he goes along in interviews? The Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), said on the radio today that that plan was not “something that is being actively considered.”

Members should note the qualifying adverb “actively”. We do not want a return to the dark days of lockdown; nor do we want to see regional lockdowns, or local lockdowns like those that we saw in Leicester, Bolton and Burnley. Can the Minister rule out such lockdowns?

Is the truth not that we are in this situation because the vaccination programme is now stalling? Ministers cannot blame the public when 2 million people have not even been invited for a booster jab, and on current trends we will not complete the booster programme until March 2022. There are currently just 165,000 jabs a day; will the Minister make a commitment to 500,000 a day, and ensure that the programme is completed by Christmas?

The Minister will know that the highest concentration of infections is among children, but only 17% of children have been vaccinated. This is a stuttering roll-out of the children's vaccination programme—and does it not expose the folly of cutting the number of school nurses and health visitors who support these immunisation programmes in our communities?

[Jonathan Ashworth]

Only 36% of over-65s have been vaccinated against flu. We hear stories of cancelled flu jabs at GPs' surgeries, and of pharmacists saying that they do not have enough supplies. Why are supplies apparently running so low? With infections, meanwhile, running so high, Ministers need to stop vacillating and get vaccinating.

The wall of defence is crumbling. We know that we have to get ahead of this virus, because otherwise it gets ahead of us. How will the Minister fix this stalling vaccination programme?

Maggie Throup: Let me first thank the right hon. Gentleman for his co-operation throughout the pandemic. However, I am a bit disappointed with his tone today. What we are seeing is the Government carrying out the plans that have been laid before Parliament—the autumn and winter plans involving plan A and plan B—and as the Secretary of State rightly said yesterday, plan A is still what we are working to.

Our vaccines have created a wall of defence. It is incredible how many people have taken up the offer, not just for the first jab but for the second, and are now coming forward for their boosters. In fact, at the start of the week 5.4 million people were eligible for their booster jabs, and 4 million people had taken up that opportunity: 4 million arms had been jabbed.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about 12 to 15-year-olds. We are now able to offer more choice to parents wanting to take their children to vaccination centres. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will agree that it is important for the choice of where children get their jabs to be as wide as possible to ensure that everyone has that opportunity. It is also important to ensure that the 4.7 million people who have not yet taken up the offer of the first jab are encouraged to come forward, because, as the right hon. Gentleman said, the vaccines are our wall of defence.

The flu vaccine programme, too, is extremely important, and people are now being called forward for the flu jab that is helping to protect us throughout the winter months. My message is this: if you receive a call for a flu jab, do not wait to receive a call for your booster jab, and vice versa. Get whichever jab you are invited for first, and that will help to protect you, your family and the people around you.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): Last week, the Health and Social Care Committee and the Science and Technology Committee published a report saying that the vaccine roll-out was one of the biggest and most impressive achievements in British public administration in our lifetime, and I want to pay tribute to the Government and to the vaccines Minister for what has been achieved. But in truth, at its peak in the spring, we were jabbing 400,000 people a day; now it is fewer than 200,000 people a day. If we look at our higher hospitalisations, cases and death rates compared with countries such as France and Germany, we can see that the heart of it is not actually things like mask wearing and covid passports; it is their higher vaccine immunity. So I want to ask the Minister two questions.

First, on the decision that people cannot have their booster jab until six months after their second job, how hard and fast should that rule be? Does it really matter,

when it is only nine weeks until the Christmas holidays, if someone has their booster jab after only five months? Should we not look at having some flexibility on that decision, so that we can get more people in for their booster jabs more quickly? Secondly, at the risk of making the Minister blush, does she not need to be a Cabinet Minister? Is it not one of the issues that the previous vaccines Minister sat at the Cabinet table and that she does not? This is such an important thing for our national defence against the virus and our utter determination to avoid another lockdown. Do we not need a vaccines Minister sitting around the Cabinet table as we did before?

Maggie Throup: I thank my right hon. Friend for his questions. I would like to reassure him that I have regular meetings with the Prime Minister and that the Prime Minister takes the vaccine roll-out extremely seriously, as does the Secretary of State. Regarding the timescale for the eligibility for boosters, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has provided advice that there should be a minimum of six months after the second jab, but I would like to reassure the House that the immunity does not fall off a cliff edge. It has waned slightly but not sufficiently, so there is still time for people to come forward. Obviously, we are encouraging them to come forward as soon as they are eligible, but they still have a huge amount of immunity over and above those who have yet to get their first jab.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): With infection levels worryingly at previous lockdown levels, with the Government being accused of having taken their foot off the brake by the British Medical Association, and with NHS leaders calling for the reintroduction of restrictions, the Secretary of State's stance of not implementing plan B at this point does not look credible. It looks like a repeat of the previous mistakes of acting too late. If the Government will not now follow Scotland's lead and bring in measures such as mask wearing to reduce infection, how much worse must things get before they implement a plan B?

Maggie Throup: Our vaccines programme has really created a wall of defence. We are in plan A, and there is still more that can be done as part of plan A. That is why I am calling on the 4.7 million people who have yet to come forward for their first jab and on others to have their booster jab as soon as they are eligible, as well as encouraging 12 to 15-year-olds to get their jab as soon as they have the opportunity.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I associate myself strongly with the Speaker's statement earlier? It really should not be difficult for Ministers to come to this House to make statements, rather than doing so at press conferences. I really do think that the Speaker's words should be taken on board by those on the Treasury Bench. It is worth saying that the number of patients in hospital with covid is lower now than it was a month ago. That is worth saying because it puts things into some context. My question is this, though, following on from the Chairman of the Health Committee. At the press conference yesterday, the Secretary of State seemed to imply that there was some reluctance among the public to come forward for booster doses. The headline in all the papers this morning was that if people do not come forward for their booster dose, we

will have restrictions back. I can see no evidence that the public are not coming forward for their booster dose when asked, so can the Minister set out clearly whether there is a problem with people coming forward when asked? If the slowness of the roll-out is actually to do with the way in which either the NHS or Ministers are administering it, leading to a problem later in the autumn, that would be on Ministers and not on the public.

Maggie Throup: My right hon. Friend is right to say that the number of hospitalisations is now lower than it was a few months ago. People do not need to wait to be contacted by their GP, community pharmacy or the NHS to come forward for their booster jab, so long as they are six months plus one week past their second jab. We are encouraging everybody to come forward, even if they have not formally been invited, by dialling 119 or going online.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I have been fortunate in the past few weeks to go to both France and Italy. Both countries have vaccination rates very similar to the UK's—in fact Italy has a slightly higher rate now—but the difference is that a person cannot go on public transport or into a supermarket without wearing a face mask, and they cannot go into a bar, restaurant or leisure centre without showing a health passport. Infection rates in those countries are now around a tenth of the infection rate in this country. Does the Minister accept those public health measures have brought down those countries' infection rates well below our level, or does she think there are other reasons why infection rates are so much higher in our country than in Italy and France?

Maggie Throup: We laid before the House our autumn and winter plan, which outlines the non-pharmaceutical interventions on which people can make their own decisions, because we believe people can make informed choices. As people see the levels rising, they will look at the guidance again and perhaps make the decision to wear a face covering in more venues.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Minister ensure that an obsession with non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as mask wearing, does not obscure the central message that the way out of this is through the continuation of the UK's excellent vaccination programme? Will she ensure that the wind is not taken out of the sails of that vaccination programme as we enter a perilous part of this cycle in the winter months? And will she ensure that the evidence that monoclonal antibodies and antivirals given to test-positive vulnerable people before hospitalisation reduces their mortality is rolled out into recommendations so that such people can receive interventions that stand every chance of reducing their mortality and ensuring their recovery, thus reducing the burden on the national health service?

Maggie Throup: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point that our vaccination programme is the best wall of defence we can have. That is why, once again, I have made the call for everybody to have their first jab, if they have not had it, and their booster jab when they are eligible, and for 12 to 15-year-olds to have their jab when they can. As he rightly says, and he has much

knowledge of this subject, monoclonal antibodies and antivirals will make big inroads into protecting the most vulnerable and the immunosuppressed. We welcome the antivirals that were announced yesterday, and over the coming months we hope they will be recognised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): If the vaccination programme is, as the Minister rightly says, our best defence against covid, why are the Government so complacent about improving vaccination rates? In Nottingham, despite the hard work of partners, less than half of under-30s have had both doses of the covid vaccine. What is she doing right now to ensure that places with lower take-ups succeed in getting more people vaccinated?

Maggie Throup: The hon. Lady raises the issue of the differential uptake in different age groups. This is why the Government and the NHS have been keen to reach out to different age groups through different mechanisms, such as using shopping centres, football stadiums and pop-up sites. That will be continuing as we move forward in the coming weeks and months.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When we are increasingly concerned about mental health, the mask the Minister was wearing only moments ago denies us the fellowship and reassurance of her friendly facial expression, but the material of which it is composed has gaps that are 5,000 times bigger than the virus, does it not?

Maggie Throup: Like my right hon. Friend, I look forward to the time when we do not need to wear face coverings, because I love to see everybody's smiling faces. However, we need to make sure that we all get jabbed, so that we can get to that stage.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Just yesterday, the Italian Prime Minister pointed at this country as an example of what not to do. We are now such an embarrassment that we are encouraging people elsewhere to follow the rules. Meanwhile, Government sources are this morning briefing that the approach the Government are taking is tantamount to herd immunity. We all know how we feel about Government sources, so can the Minister be clear: is herd immunity the plan? If it is not, what is?

Maggie Throup: I am disappointed in the hon. Lady's approach, because we have led the way not only in vaccines, sourcing them very early on, but in antivirals. It is fantastic news that we were first with vaccines and that, through the Prime Minister's setting up the antivirals taskforce, we now have the opportunity of some antiviral tablets as well, which will make a huge, huge difference. We are continuing to lead the world.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Mr Speaker was right to blow a gasket this morning about the Government yet again announcing major policy in a press conference and not coming to this House. The excellent Minister at the Dispatch Box has been sent in on a sticky wicket without a bat. Would it be possible for her to tell us what bright spark in Downing Street thought it right that this House should be held in contempt so that they can get their communications strategy right? If she cannot tell me that now, perhaps she can tell me when she comes back later.

Maggie Throup: I am sure my hon. Friend is aware that the Secretary of State laid the written ministerial statement in the House yesterday outlining the antiviral announcement that was made in Downing Street last night.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Minister said a few minutes ago that the level of protection from vaccination is still very high in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) pointed out that we have similar vaccination levels to those of France and Italy, but she did not answer him on what the difference was on infection rates. Does she believe that the reason they have so much lower levels of infection, hospitalisation and death in France and Italy than in this country is the range of measures that he outlined, or does she believe there is some other reason for that? If not, will she say why the Government have not introduced similar measures, including mask wearing, ventilation in buildings and the kind of green passes my hon. Friend mentioned?

Maggie Throup: There is a chance I might sound like a broken record, but our vaccines really are our wall of defence and our first line of defence. We must continue to make sure that everybody comes forward for their first dose, second dose and booster dose, and this includes 12 to 15-year-olds.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I thank the Minister for her work on this and I welcome the advanced treatments. When I speak to people in Scunthorpe, I find that they are really concerned about any potential increase in restrictions. They are right to be worried about that, but we also understand that this is an incredibly challenging situation for the Government to balance. Will she once again reassure people in Scunthorpe and our surrounding villages that should the Government conclude that further restrictions are necessary, this House will have a proper opportunity to debate, discuss and vote on those measures?

Maggie Throup: I reassure my hon. Friend that we are following plan A and we still have more to do in plan A to put in place all the measures to protect our communities—people in constituencies throughout the UK—and to continue to build that wall of defence and to have our freedoms.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): If the Government believe that the NHS is not under pressure, I urge the Minister to speak to NHS and care workers in Newcastle, for whom the pressure is becoming unbearable.

There are measures that we can all take to protect the NHS, yet it is clear to me from travelling on Newcastle's metro and buses that many people are not wearing masks. Constituents have written to me to express their concern, so will the Minister reiterate the Secretary of State's urging that we all wear masks? Will she explain why she will not make the wearing of masks mandatory? Will she commit that her Conservative MP colleagues will start doing so?

Maggie Throup: Plan A outlines the guidance that is in place and that is the guidance that people should be following. It is up to individuals to work out what

works for them and what is best for them. Plan B incorporates the mandatory wearing of masks, but we are on plan A.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The news of the new antiviral treatments that we heard about yesterday is very welcome, as is, of course, the fastest vaccine roll-out programme in the world.

We voted to break our manifesto commitment in order to give the NHS billions of pounds more of our constituents' money, primarily to deal with the covid backlog, yet there is a depressingly familiar drumbeat on moving towards plan B and plan B+, and plan C is in the papers today—as mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth)—without mention of a penny of that new money.

May I ask the Minister about jabbing our young people? The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation came up with one piece of advice and the chief medical officer was asked to come with another one, until we got the answer that we wanted from him; does the Minister think that has something to do with why parents are confused? What more can she and her office do to convince the parents of teenagers that vaccination is in the interests of the young person? That will hopefully then drive up vaccination rates as vaccines go online according to the schedule in schools.

Maggie Throup: I reassure my hon. Friend that there is a lot of communication through schools and directly to parents and children to ensure that they understand the importance of 12 to 15-year-olds receiving their jabs, which will protect not only them but their loved ones.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): As we approach the second year of covid, it is astonishing that so many Members on the Conservative Benches still try to make out that to be vaccinated and to wear a mask are alternative protections. That is a bit like saying, "If you have brakes on your car, why should you bother with a steering wheel and a seatbelt?" I was pleased that yesterday the Secretary of State repeatedly emphasised the need for everyone to wear face masks unless they had a genuine reason for exemption. Is it not very noticeable that more masks are visible on the Conservative Benches today than were visible yesterday, when those Benches were full for Prime Minister's questions? Is that an indication that Conservative MPs have been told that they have to practise what the Secretary of State preaches and wear their masks in all circumstances in which the advice says they are needed?

Maggie Throup: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I am wearing my face covering today out of choice and because I believe it is the right thing to do.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): We know that the success of any public health roll-out comes through working closely with local councils and local government, so will the Minister let the House know when she last spoke to the Association of Directors of Public Health or the Local Government Association about the potential plan B and how it would be successful?

Maggie Throup: I have spoken to numerous stakeholders with regard to my portfolio. I reassure the hon. Lady that we address the issues as and when we need to.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): When I speak to my constituents I sense there is an element of uncertainty as to exactly who is entitled to a booster vaccination. May I ask the Minister to be really clear for my constituents in Warrington: who is eligible and how can they check?

Maggie Throup: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. It is really important to make sure that people understand that, if they had their second jab six months ago, plus one week to allow for a bit of admin, they are eligible. They may get a text or a letter from the NHS, but if they do not, they can go online or phone 119 to book their jab.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Some months ago, the Prime Minister rolled up to Billingham in my constituency for a picture opportunity that Fujifilm scheduled for the manufacture of the Novavax vaccine starting around now. Since then the Government have gone very quiet about this new product and we have recently learned that the thousands of people who volunteered to take part in the Novavax trials are being given alternative vaccines to ensure that they are properly covered. While Fujifilm has assured me that the delay in the vaccine being submitted for approval will not affect jobs in Billingham, Novavax cannot be bothered to respond to the local MP. The Government have already ordered tens of millions of doses. Can the Minister offer a progress report on the trials and approval process for Novavax?

Maggie Throup: First, let me say a huge thank you to everybody who came forward to take part in clinical trials. Without those volunteers, we would not be where we are today, having the amazing vaccines that are helping to save lives. To ensure that I have the absolute up-to-date information, may I write to the hon. Gentleman on the latest with regards to those specific trials?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The problem is that the Government have put all their eggs in one basket with the vaccine when they should also be implementing public health measures and providing clear leadership on that. They should also restore the contact tracing that local authorities were doing with great success in locking down the virus. The Government took that right away from them, so will the Minister restore contact tracing to local authorities?

Maggie Throup: The Government have a range of measures. We have vaccines; we are world leading on antivirals; and we have lots of other measures. As I go about my constituency, I see many people blipping into venues, wearing their face coverings when they are shopping and lots of different things. It is important that people have that choice and make decisions based on the current circumstances.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Low-paid frontline workers without access to decent sick pay have been most likely to lose their lives during the crisis. Is it not those workers who will pay the price for this complacency?

Maggie Throup: The Government have been extremely generous in their support throughout this pandemic and will continue to be so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I wish the Minister well in her new role. Will she outline what plans are in place to begin to get on top of waiting lists, for example on breast reconstruction post mastectomy, hip replacements and tonsil operations? Will additional funding be made available to outsource work to private hospitals to reduce waiting lists and to give people back their health, mobility and confidence?

Maggie Throup: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I reassure him that a lot of investment is being put into the health service, as I am sure he is aware, to ensure that we can tackle the backlog that has been created because of the pandemic.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I gather there may be a point of order. Did somebody wish to raise a point of order? We need to move on. There should be a statement from the Secretary of State.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Ah—a point of order!

Emily Thornberry: Can you advise me how best to deal with the stress levels created by this morning's timetable? I do not mean to complain—I am a big girl—but, quite frankly, I had departmental questions this morning, we heard on the grapevine that there was going to be a statement on the Trade and Agriculture Commission, for which we have been waiting for more than six months, and we also heard last night that there was going to be a deal with New Zealand.

I got a copy of the Government statement on the deal with New Zealand at six minutes past 10 this morning, when I was obviously on my feet dealing with departmental questions here. I do not complain about where my office is, as I have a wonderful office, but it does take quite a long time to get to it. I need to get to it, pick up the statement that has been given to me by the Government, read it, write what I am going to say, make sure that it is only half the length of the statement and then come back.

I also want to make reference, of course, to the Trade and Agriculture Commission, which the Government have said is a really important part of any future deal that they negotiate, because of the grave concerns that farmers have about their future business, to which the TAC is supposed to be part of the remedy. We got a written ministerial statement, which I received 20 minutes ago while running back from my office. *[Laughter.]* I got a ministerial statement at six minutes past 10. We have to put all those things together. Although in many ways it is funny, if I was a frontline farmer I would not find this funny at all.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Lady for that point of order. I very much suspect that the Secretary of State should also thank the right hon. Lady for that point of order. We have had some examples this morning of the way in which not to do business in this House. It is vital that Secretaries of State ensure that they are here in good time for their statements. I think that expresses the opinion of all in this House. Stress levels have been raised by this, so the best thing now is to move on as quickly as possible. I am sure that the International Trade Secretary will want to apologise—I call her to make her statement.

Free Trade Agreement: New Zealand

11.6 am

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Let me first thank the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for what I am sure were, as always, wise words in her point of order, and for the opportunity to set out to the House some of the key issues that we will be discussing. I take absolute note of the points that have been raised.

With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the new agreement in principle between the UK and New Zealand on our free trade agreement, which we are working towards delivering.

Yesterday, the UK agreed in principle the main details of a trade deal. A UK-New Zealand free trade agreement will be another major trade deal, like our agreement with Australia. This marks a significant step towards the UK's aim to join the £8.4 trillion comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership free trade area. The UK-New Zealand trade relationship was worth £2.3 billion last year and is set to grow under the deal. Both Prime Ministers have heralded the new partnership, which will take on some of the biggest global challenges, from climate change to gender equality, respect for indigenous communities and the future of digital trade.

This deal is part of the Government's commitment to building back better, bringing the benefits of trade to level up all parts of the country. Our shared history with New Zealand, common values and commitment to free trade is matched by a dedication to high standards and the rule of law. It makes complete sense to do a trade deal with New Zealand, and it will continue to strengthen our long-standing relationships as key allies and friends.

We have laid out the core benefits of a deal as per the agreement in principle. A comprehensive trade agreement with New Zealand will slash red tape and deepen access for our advanced tech and services companies, while making it easier for smaller businesses to break into the New Zealand market. UK workers will benefit from better business travel arrangements to New Zealand, and UK professionals such as lawyers and architects will be able to work in New Zealand more easily, allowing UK companies to set up shop in New Zealand and bring the best British talent with them.

High-quality New Zealand products that British consumers love will become more affordable, from Marlborough sauvignon blanc to manuka honey and kiwi fruit. The new agreement in principle means that existing tariffs as high as 10% will be removed on a huge range of UK goods, from shoes to ships and from buses to bulldozers, giving British exporters an advantage over international rivals in the New Zealand import market, which is expected to grow by 30% by 2030.

Throughout negotiations, we have remained in close contact with businesses, farmers and other stakeholders. We will back British farmers in opening up new export opportunities, such as to the CPTPP markets, which are expected to account for a quarter of global import demand for meat by 2030. The agreement in principle adds momentum for accession to CPTPP, of which

New Zealand is a key member. CPTPP had a joint GDP of £8.4 trillion in 2020 and includes some of the biggest economies of the present and the future, from Japan and Mexico to Malaysia and Singapore. By 2030, two thirds of the world's middle classes will be in Asia, creating unparalleled opportunities for UK businesses. Britain needs to be positioned in the coming decades to trade freely with these high-growth parts of the world.

The Governments of New Zealand and the United Kingdom now intend to finalise the free trade agreement text before signature and subsequent entry into force of the deal. Once signed, the deal will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk, alongside an independently scrutinised impact assessment. There will be full and robust scrutiny of the deal, including time for the relevant parliamentary Committees to produce a report on the deal before it is ratified. In addition, the new Trade and Agriculture Commission, chaired by Professor Lorand Bartels, will provide expert and independent advice to the Government and Parliament once the deal has reached signature stage. The new commission will look specifically at how the deal is consistent with relevant domestic statutory protections, ensuring that world-leading British agricultural standards are upheld. This agreement will strengthen ties between two nations committed to free and fair trade, delivering strategic and economic benefits to the United Kingdom.

This agreement in principle on a free trade deal is a win-win for two natural trading partners. It is tailored to the UK's strengths, slashes tariffs on our exports and deepens access for British businesses. Our like-minded democracies will now unite to take on great global challenges such as climate change while harnessing opportunities such as digital trade. A UK-New Zealand free trade agreement will show what global Britain can achieve as a sovereign trading nation.

This agreement in principle is just one part of our ambitious strategy to deepen trade ties with like-minded partners and ensure that these alliances create a more predictable, free and fair framework for British businesses. Free trade is not something to be frightened of or to run away from. We want to be working with allies to influence the rules of the game and, in today's world, FTAs are the vehicles by which those rules are shaped.

This deal will be a modern partnership for the 21st century: two staunch democracies working together to meet global challenges from climate change to the future of digital trade. Together we will embrace the opportunities of the global marketplace to support jobs, enterprise and wealth creation. We will fuel our recovery from the covid crisis through free trade and demonstrate that it is part of the solution to the greatest challenges of our time. That is what this agreement in principle represents, and I commend this statement to the House.

11.12 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. While there is much to digest from last night's agreement, I hope she will forgive me if, in the short time that I have, I focus on the impact of the deal on our farming communities.

As I have already mentioned today, according to the Government's own forecasts, this deal will lead to reductions in growth and jobs in the UK's farming sector because, as the scoping paper says,

“New Zealand producers may be able to supply UK retailers and UK producers at lower cost relative to domestic producers.”

In those circumstances, any other Government would normally keep in place quotas to stop their farmers from being undercut, but, just like with the Australia deal, our Government have set those quotas so high as to be utterly meaningless. In year 1 of this new deal, New Zealand can export four times as much lamb as it did last year before any tariffs kick in; it can export more butter to Britain than it has done in the past six years put together before facing a single tariff; and it can export 25 times more beef, entirely tariff-free, as it can right now with a 20% tariff. For all practical purposes, this deal therefore gives us unlimited, tariff-free trade from New Zealand to go with unlimited, tariff-free trade already agreed with Australia, confirming this as the precedent that every other major exporter will now expect to follow. Not just that, but we are eliminating the tariffs on dozens of products from Australia and New Zealand that fall well short of our domestic welfare standards. This includes our domestic restrictions on antibiotics, whose production is doing huge damage to the environment.

These are bad deals for our farming industry. They will undermine the competitiveness of our farmers and the standards that they are required to maintain. In other words, these deals are exactly what the Trade and Agriculture Commission was established to prevent. That brings me to the appointment of the new TAC members confirmed by the Secretary of State earlier and to the written ministerial statement, which the House has just received, containing her response to the TAC report, seven and a half months after it was submitted.

There are two crucial issues at stake in those announcements, and they are inextricably linked to the deals with Australia and New Zealand. The first concerns the TAC’s recommendations to establish a national framework of standards covering food safety, animal welfare and the environment, and to use that framework to determine which imports from Australia and New Zealand should benefit from the elimination of tariffs. We know that that recommendation is entirely feasible and entirely practical, because DEFRA Ministers are currently consulting on applying exactly the same principle when it comes to labelling food products for their impact on animal welfare. Their consultation proposes a clear distinction between

“baseline UK welfare regulations which UK farmers are required to meet”

and “imports of lower welfare” that are undercutting our farmers.

May I ask the Secretary of State three questions? Why has she rejected the recommendation on the use of a standards framework to determine the scope of tariff reductions? Can she confirm that, as a result, a number of products described by DEFRA as “imports of lower welfare” will have their tariffs reduced under the deals with Australia and New Zealand? Can she explain why it is possible to differentiate on standards when it comes to labels placed on imports, but not on the tariffs they face?

The second fundamental issue is around the role of the TAC in relation to Australia and New Zealand. Members of Parliament, the media, the public and, most of all, our farming communities were repeatedly

promised last November that the new TAC would provide Parliament with an assessment of every trade deal for how it would affect the competitiveness of UK farmers and whether it would undercut the standards they are required to meet. No matter how that role was defined in statute, we all know what we were promised. If the new TAC is not going to assess these two trade deals in that way, not only is that utterly shameful, but it will turn the TAC into a total waste of time.

I hope the Secretary of State will honour those promises, because if we ever needed a better illustration of why we need the TAC to perform that role, we have it in the deals agreed with New Zealand and Australia. That is why it is more vital and more urgent than ever that the new TAC should be able to do the job that the House was promised and act as the voice of the farmer when it comes to passing verdict on these two new deals. I ask the Secretary of State again: will she let the TAC do its job?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I will do my best to answer the right hon. Lady’s questions. We are really pleased. The deal is really balanced and brings lots of exciting opportunities for our businesses and our consumers. We will see customs duties on 100% of tariff lines for originating products removed. The UK will eliminate tariffs on 96.7% of tariff lines on the day the FTA comes into force, and New Zealand will eliminate 100% on the day the FTA comes into force.

On beef, the UK will remove duties after 10 years, and the quota volume will increase in equal annual instalments to ensure that the markets can stabilise and grow as required. To the right hon. Lady’s point about the increase in sheepmeat capacity, the interesting thing with New Zealand is that it already has a much larger World Trade Organisation quota that it does not use with the UK because, as we discussed earlier, it has the opportunity to sell many of its meat products into the Asian markets, where it gets high prices. We are therefore not expecting New Zealand to use these quotas in these early years, but we look to the opportunity for us to work for mutual benefit. For butter, full liberalisation will be over a five-year period, and it is similar for cheese.

This is a really exciting deal, and not only for the food and agriculture sector. There is a huge amount of opportunity for our businesses, looking at the digital space in particular and service provision. I reiterate—we will keep saying it until the Opposition are willing to be comfortable with it, if required—that we will never compromise standards for food coming into the UK. I had an interesting conversation with a farmer just last week, who was perhaps more forward-thinking than some Opposition Members. As we have different pests and different soil types, the sorts of products used in other countries may be different, but that does not mean that the quality, standard or welfare is lower. We will always be clear that we will not accept the lowering of standards. We appreciate that different countries have to manage their climatic and environmental situations in different ways, so that will continue to be the case.

I am pleased that the right hon. Lady has seen the written ministerial statement just put out by the Department on the TAC response and the launch of the new Trade and Agriculture Commission, which will be independent. It will have the opportunity to scrutinise all those free

[*Anne-Marie Trevelyan*]

trade deals as they come forward, including, in the first instance, the New Zealand and Australia deals, once we have brought them to a full signed conclusion.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, in particular her reference to encouraging small businesses and the opportunities that the deal provides for them. Will she ensure that her Department focuses on small and medium-sized businesses and encourages them to enter the export market? On a wider point, prior to our misguided decision to join the European Community, we had good trading relationships with New Zealand, Australia and the wider Commonwealth. Will she assure that House that she will do everything possible to extend deals with our Commonwealth friends?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for his encouragement of the work that we are doing. In order to support and assist small and medium-sized enterprises, we want to champion their great products and services more widely than in the UK. Only a small proportion of businesses that could export, do so, and we are keen to ramp that up and give them support.

The export support service that was launched on 1 October supports businesses that are thinking about or are already exporting to the EU. We look to grow that as the service embeds. We also have the Open Doors campaign, which is an opportunity to help champion some of the fantastic UK goods and services that exist. We will continue to grow that too.

I charge all Members to come and talk to us about businesses in their constituencies and issues that they want us to champion as we go around the world and have the opportunity. In Commonwealth countries, there is much potential for mutual bilateral trade, so Members should help us to make sure that we are opening those doors for them.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I have looked hard to try to find something to welcome, so let me start with a positive: we welcome the promotion of trade in environmental goods and services, although naturally the detail will need to be reviewed.

The UK Government's assessment shows that an FTA with New Zealand would bring zero benefit and, indeed, could lead to a contraction in GDP. The Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) talked earlier about timescales and giving it time, so can the Secretary of State tell us how long it will take for this deal to make up even 0.5% of the 14% drop in Scottish food and drink exports to the EU?

Ministers have clearly shown that they need help in understanding Scotland's trade, so will the Secretary of State ensure that the Scottish Government are involved in the detail of the agreement? Bilateral trade has important impacts and implications for services, so given the sector's importance to Scotland, it is vital that the Scottish Government are also involved in those details.

The deal, as it stands, provides protections for meat imports only by phasing reductions to zero, which is opposed by the National Farmers Union. Will the Secretary of State look to build further protections into

the agreement, such as tonnage quota systems and percentage controls? According to the Government's figures, the deal will cut employment in our farming communities, but for what—possibly about £112 million? That is about half the cost of the Prime Minister's new yacht. Is that really a good deal?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Some of our most fantastic brands and products come out of Scottish businesses and all the trade deals that we are putting together and negotiating have some of those at the top of our call list. We want to make sure that that continues by opening up more markets, which will provide opportunities for fantastic Scottish whisky, amazing Scottish beef and many other products, many of which are green products that are helping to solve some of the climate challenges that we all face. We want to make sure that those businesses can export not only to our EU partners but more widely, and we want to see that grow.

Built into the New Zealand agreement in principle are a clear set of quotas that grow over a number of years to ensure, on the hon. Gentleman's point, that we can see those changes in imports work well with our own commerce. As I make new trade deals, I want to ensure that our farmers are finding new markets for their products. We are seeing, as I mentioned in my statement, a growth in markets across Asia, where the call for high-quality produce is growing by the year, and we want to make sure that our farmers and our businesses are part of that success.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): May I use this opportunity to welcome my right hon. Friend to her place? I wish her all success, and I welcome this statement. Many of my constituents are deeply concerned about climate change. Could the Secretary of State outline how this new free trade agreement will promote our efforts to tackle climate change as well as growing our respective economies?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I said earlier, it is absolutely critical to this Government that, as we find ways to grow our businesses and grow our economic growth, we also, right alongside, continue to champion, as we are with the presidency of COP26, the solutions that we all need to find to meet that climate challenge. This is a really exciting free trade agreement in which there is a very strong environment and climate change chapter, where we set out very clearly our mutual commitment to the Paris agreement and all that goes with that, and the challenge of keeping 1.5° C alive. For all our constituents, we should have confidence that that mutual support for meeting that challenge is absolutely embedded in this deal. We will have the opportunity, as our innovators and our businesses come up with new solutions, to take those goods and services to New Zealand with no tariff limitations.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Cambridge people care deeply about the quality of their food, and they will want to know that anything imported is produced to our high standards. I listened closely to the Secretary of State's response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), and she did not address the question of the framework standards suggested by the previous Trade and Agriculture Commission. So can I ask her again: will the Government be adopting that framework or not?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I have said, we recognise the importance that both countries attach to high welfare standards. New Zealand and the UK have committed together to a specific chapter on animal welfare reaffirming those key points about food production. Indeed, to the hon. Gentleman's point, we will absolutely ensure always that goods coming into the UK do not fall below the standards that we set and that we want to ensure for the safety of our constituents.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on achieving this agreement in principle. Can I assume that it follows very similar lines to the agreement with Australia, so that we can have full triangulation for the UK with Australia and New Zealand, between whom there is already a unique relationship in their trade? Could she explain how this will assist and help in an even further expansion of free trade for this country through the CPTPP accession negotiations?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: My hon. Friend raises a really important point. We have submitted our application to become a member of the CPTPP, which is a group of 11 countries that work together with a free trade agreement. We are the first new member to apply, and we are presently going through what I can only describe as an exam process as our legislative requirements are tested against its framework. It is incredibly important. New Zealand and Australia are two key partners within the CPTPP, and in having these two first free trade agreements with them, we are setting out very clearly what is important to us. As I say, with this New Zealand agreement today, we are setting out all the areas that are really critical to us and indeed to our businesses. It shows the importance that we will continue to give to what free and fair trade means. It is ensuring that our businesses are working in a fair and competitive environment so that they can sell their fantastic produce. I have the fantastic challenge and joy of being able to share that across the world. I am making sure that, as we look to that CPTPP market, through these first two trade deals we are setting out our important and, indeed, great offer.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Taking a piecemeal approach to trade agreements is having an impact in many sectors, but especially for farmers. What assessment have the Government made of the cumulative effect of all these free trade agreements on sectors such as farming?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The cumulative effect of more and more free trade deals is the opportunity for our fantastic businesses that provide goods and services to reach many more markets. The huge growth in population, and wealthier communities across Asia in particular, are markets that we want our businesses to have every opportunity to access, because we believe that our products are some of the best in the world.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate the Department and the Secretary of State on this announcement. I chair the all-party group for small and micro business, so will the Secretary of State set out what the trade deal means for small and microbusinesses, which are the backbone of our country, including in my constituency of Meriden?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Our small and medium-sized businesses, and indeed our micro, small and medium-sized businesses—known as MSMEs if said quickly—make up 95% of the backbone of our businesses. At the G20 trade talks last week, we discussed that area in some detail, because all nations across the G20 know that a business might be a microbusiness this year, but in 10 years' time it could be a major business in any of those economies. As we build these trade deals, we want to ensure that things such as reductions in tariffs and the opening up of digital trade, mean opportunities for our small businesses today, so that they have the opportunity to become great trading businesses of the future.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State has a beautiful north-east constituency, and she knows that, like many of my constituents, I take great pleasure in the gorgeous north-east landscape with its wild hills and beautiful coastline. That is a consequence of small-scale farming, with high standards of animal protection, environmental protection, and sustainability. What does she say to north-east farmers who are facing huge levels of unfair competition from massive increases in New Zealand imports to this country? Will she guarantee that not one north-east farmer will fail as a consequence of this agreement?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Lady and I agree that Northumbrian lamb is, without a doubt, best in the world, and I am happy to say that to any New Zealander who wants to take me on and challenge me. We have meat imports from the EU that are much greater than those we now receive from New Zealand, and they will continue to be. As I have said, New Zealand has not taken up its quotas already, and I am not at all concerned that the high quality produce made by Northumbrian farmers, or indeed in any other part of our wonderful UK, will be put at risk. We are selling some of the best quality produce in the world, and that will continue to be the case. As we make new free trade deals, we will open up more markets for farmers to use.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the agreement reached with New Zealand. She will know that Warrington has some of the finest gin production anywhere in the world. What will this agreement mean for small spirit producers in Warrington?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I did not know that Warrington was the centre of gin, but now I have discovered that I will have to go and visit as soon as possible. The trade deal strips away tariffs on all goods with rules of origin, and clearly a producer of Warrington gin, which absolutely is a Warrington gin, will have the opportunity to take their goods to market in New Zealand without tariffs. I look forward to championing Warrington gin, and all other forms of British gin.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have not tasted gin-soaked lamb recently, so I am not quite sure what it tastes like, but that is by the way. What discussions have taken place with Ministers in the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs at the Northern Ireland Assembly to assess the impact on and benefits for Northern Ireland agriculture from this new deal? What protections are in place for our farming sector, to

[*Jim Shannon*]

ensure that it continues to produce the high quality, ethically raised food that our Northern Ireland farmers within the United Kingdom produce on a daily basis?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: My ministerial colleagues and I have regular discussions with our counterparts in all the devolved nations, and I know that such conversations went on with Ministers yesterday to really get a sense of, and to encourage, the exciting opportunities that now exist with the agreement in principle. As we move from this stage to finalisation—this is where it gets complicated, with pages and pages of legal text, and lawyers are required—there will be refinement to ensure that all those nations have their concerns and, indeed, the important issues that they want raised, crystallised into the final deal.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her work on the agreement, and for the particularly good news about sauvignon blanc. Will she please say a little more about the effect on manufacturing businesses and jobs, particularly in the north of England? What support may be available for those businesses that want to take advantage of the agreement and export to New Zealand?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I think many of us will be excited at the reduced price, potentially, of our glass of New Zealand wine of an evening. This goes in both directions. We will want to champion the opportunities for small businesses across our constituencies, and the Department is there to support and guide. We now have not only trade and investment hubs here in the UK but both trade commissioners and great trade envoys. I know that they will help us to champion the great businesses we have here to ensure that they are known and loved, and become part of the landscape of New Zealand's markets.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The National Farmers Union of Scotland has just released a statement expressing great anger over this latest trade deal, describing it as

“merely a slow journey to allow New Zealand...unfettered access to food and drink UK markets.”

The Government keep saying that high food and environmental standards in the UK will continue for UK-produced goods, apparently failing to recognise, if I am being generous, that farmers will be forced to

reduce those standards when they are competing against tariff-free goods produced to lower standards in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and, as those trade deals have set a precedent, all the other countries to follow. The National Farmers Union of Scotland sees that very clearly. Will the Secretary of State at least acknowledge its concerns and recognise that as a possibility?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The UK has some of the finest standards in the world, and indeed some of the finest produce, which is exported with great success across the world. As our landmark Environment Bill comes through and work continues to set out the new frameworks to support our farming communities since we have left the common agricultural policy, we will be working hand in glove with all our farming communities to ensure that they have the support and the drive to be successful 21st century farming businesses that are able to take up the opportunities that all the free trade deals—not only those with Australia and New Zealand but all those to come—will bring to take their great products into markets across the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Final question—Ben Lake.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the Secretary of State will be aware of similar concerns expressed by the agricultural unions in Wales overnight and this morning in the light of the agreement in principle. Given that the Government's own analysis suggests that the number of people working in agriculture may be negatively impacted by this deal, I think those concerns are well founded. May I ask her, quite simply: how will Ceredigion farmers benefit from this deal?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Farmers will have the opportunity to reach out and share their wares more widely; that continues to be the case. I continue to proffer reassurance that New Zealand already has an enormous WTO quota, which it does not use with the UK because it exports a lot of its sheepmeat to Asian markets. Indeed, much of the EU imports that come into the UK are balanced easily by the fantastic British produce that comes from our Northumbrian and Welsh farmers—and, indeed, any other of our farmers, but we have a very strong voice for those two farming communities in particular. I reassure hon. Members that giving our farmers opportunities to reach out and build new relationships and new trading routes is our great passion, and we will continue to do that in the Department.

Business of the House

11.39 am

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing Monday 25 October will include:

MONDAY 25 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill.

TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill, followed by Second Reading of the Judicial Review and Courts Bill.

WEDNESDAY 27 OCTOBER—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 28 OCTOBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 1 November will include:

MONDAY 1 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

WEDNESDAY 3 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of a Bill.

THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER—Business to be determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 5 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

Friday 5 November is a particularly important parliamentary date. Fortunately, considering what once happened, the House will not be sitting.

May I, at the end of my statement, Madam Deputy Speaker, by your leave, add words of tribute to our hon. and right hon. Friends, Sir David Amess and James Brokenshire? They have had tributes paid to them already, but they are so sadly missed by this House.

David Amess was one of the most regular contributors to business questions. I have the list of some of the subjects he raised with me: forced adoption, violent crime, face-to-face GP appointments, child sexual exploitation, do-not-attempt-resuscitation orders, zoonotic diseases, discretionary pension increases, endometriosis, animal welfare, a memorial to Dame Vera Lynn, and, obviously, Southend city status. Everybody adored David because he was such a champion of democratic rights for his constituents, but he did it all with such courtesy. However much he might have been trying to prod the Government into doing something, he was, of all the people who dealt with my Parliamentary Private Secretary, the most charming, the most kindly, the most willing to be open to discussion and thoughtfulness. He is desperately missed by all of us and missed because of the death that happened in such a particularly cruel way.

James was, again, somebody of the greatest popularity in the House. It is, I think, particularly poignant. There are quite a lot of tough cookies in this House, aren't there? As I look around, I know that some of us are quite hard-boiled eggs. We have lost two of the nicest, gentlest, kindest and best people. I went to speak for James in his constituency. That is always a telling thing to do, because one sees how people are in their own patch. His association and his members adored him. They adored him because they really knew him. They saw his many great qualities and his openness and

availability, somebody who had been a normal person in his constituency even when surrounded by the personal protection that a Northern Ireland Secretary has to have.

They are both desperately missed and one's heart bleeds for their families. There are no words of comfort for them. It is just so desperately sad. I remind hon. and right hon. Members that books of condolence are still open in the Library in the end room, Room D, nearest to Mr Speaker's office. I encourage Members, if they wish to, to go and sign the book of condolence.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business.

May I join him in his tributes to two fine parliamentarians? It is often a shock to some party members that we in this House can find common cause with each other across the Dispatch Box and across the divide of the House, yet these were two such Members who gave one great hope that democracy provides a way for people with very different political views to nonetheless work together and achieve change for their own constituents but also for the country. I consider both of them a terrible, terrible loss. That has been evident in the way people have spoken of them this week. I think of David this morning fondly and with a smile, because he would have been championing Southend. He is missed. I look around for him now and think, where is he? This moment is bittersweet. I think the right hon. Gentleman and I feel the same way about that. There is no more fitting tribute—it is the reason I am smiling—than that he can rest in peace knowing that his campaign for Southend to be a city has been fulfilled. We thank Her Majesty for making that swift and good decision.

On to the business: I am glad that the Leader of the House has rescheduled Monday's business so promptly, and it is important, of course, that we do not fall behind, but I understand that any amendments for the Report stage of the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Bill will need to be in by the rise of the House today, which does not leave much time for Members to scrutinise the Bill before tabling their amendments. Does he agree and would he like to make any further comment about how Members are supposed to scrutinise the Bill if they do not get any time to scrutinise it before they can try to amend it?

While I am on the subject of Northern Ireland, the Government also promised to legislate by the end of October on language provisions—including the Irish language Act—agreed in the New Decade, New Approach deal, as part of the restoration of the power-sharing arrangement at Stormont. However, that does not seem to appear in next week's business, so will the Leader of the House tell us when that legislation will be tabled and when the commitments made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be fulfilled?

I desperately want to know what is going on on 3 November. It is not that far away; I do not think it is too much to ask. The Leader of the House is very courteous about giving advance notice of things as far as is possible, so will he urge his colleagues to let us in on which Bill we are having a Second Reading of on 3 November? Rumours abound and it would be good to get the facts so that we can get our teeth into it.

[Thangam Debbonaire]

In Prime Minister's questions yesterday, the Prime Minister appeared to confirm, first, that the Online Safety Bill would have completed all stages by Christmas. It was then just going to be Second Reading and now it seems that No. 10 have rowed back even further, to a vague commitment that the Bill will be presented at some point during this Session—that is not even before Christmas. Will the Leader of the House help us out and tell us what the timetabling is for that Bill, because the Prime Minister does not seem to know?

On Monday, the Transport Secretary put out a written statement about the changes to travel guidance, including that, from this Sunday, travellers will no longer need to take an expensive PCR test when returning to this country and, instead, they will be able to take a lateral flow test. Opposition Members have been calling for months for a simplified system for international travel, affordability of tests and the publication of full country-by-country data. I am glad that the Government have finally listened. However, the list of approved providers for lateral flow tests is not yet available, and we are talking about Sunday. It will not be published until tomorrow, just two days in advance. That causes yet more uncertainty for our constituents, so will the Leader of the House ask the Transport Secretary to come back to the House to provide a fuller statement?

The heat and buildings strategy published earlier this week mentions a commitment on installing new heat pumps. It seems a bit strange that that is being heralded as a flagship policy when it appears that only 30,000 heat pumps a year will be subsidised through the policy, and for only three years. That is roughly only one in every 1,000 of the 30 million buildings in total in Britain—hardly a flagship. And with some of the least energy-efficient housing in Europe, millions of UK homes may require far more significant upgrades to be suitable for heat pumps, insulation and so on. Can the Leader of the House ask the energy and clean growth Minister—the Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands)—to come back to the House to explain why this policy appears to be about as successful in prospect as the failed green homes grant?

This week, we heard that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe lost her appeal, without a court hearing, against her second jail term, and is now waiting to be called back to prison in Iran. Anoosheh Ashoori has had his request for conditional release and an appeal against his 10-year sentence thrown out. So I ask the right hon. Gentleman again: when will the Government bring them, and all other UK citizens wrongly imprisoned abroad, home?

Finally—sort of finally—I know that this is something that the Leader of the House is committed to improving, and I did mention it before summer recess, so it disappoints me to have to raise it again: Members are still not receiving timely responses to written questions, ministerial correspondence and MP hotlines. A hotline cannot be called a hotline if it is barely tepid. So far, despite the right hon. Gentleman's definite best efforts—I have witnessed that—there seems to have been very little improvement, so can he once again remind his Cabinet colleagues of their responsibilities?

This is finally: the Health Secretary said yesterday—unfortunately not to this House, but to a press conference—that it is crucial for people to act responsibly and wear masks in crowded places to avoid future restrictions. I give Government Members, including the Leader of the House, the opportunity to see that one can have a very natty matching mask to go with one's outfit. The right hon. Gentleman may wish to talk to his tailor about what they can construct. I strongly urge him to do so, because we do seriously need to set the highest possible, best example to the public if we are to avoid the winter crisis that none of us wants.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the tribute that she paid.

Masks are a very interesting matter. After this sitting, I might retweet—you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is amazing modern technology on social media—a picture from the socialists' conference that took place recently. Do you know the most extraordinary thing? There are all these luminaries of the Opposition Benches—some of the most formidable figures in British political life—and their faces are naked and unadorned.

What I have heard about the drinks party sponsored by the *Daily Mirror* at the socialists' party conference—well! I do not know that they were able to get the drinks through their masks. That may be the reason that masks are worn more by socialists when there are television cameras around than when they are not going to be seen. I wonder whether we might suggest that the Doorkeepers, who historically have generously provided snuff for Members who wish to take it, should replace the supply of snuff with the supply of humbugs. That might, on occasions, prove more useful.

As regards timely responses, I am in entire agreement with the hon. Lady. Members have a right to timely responses. I have taken up quite a number of right hon. and hon. Members' requests for speedier responses, and I am always willing to do so. That is not, in the end, an answer, because my office is not big enough to chase responses for 649 other Members, but I encourage Members to come to my office and I will do what I can to help. I will, of course, remind Ministers of this responsibility, which is quite clearly set out in the ministerial code.

I share the hon. Lady's frustration about the way in which Nazanin has been treated. I can tell the House what the Government have done—the Foreign Secretary and all levels continue to push for Nazanin's immediate and unconditional release—but we are dealing with a barbarous regime that does not follow the proper rules of international law and justice in its own country. There are, I am afraid, limits to what the Government can do, but I am grateful to the hon. Lady for pushing this important case.

As regards the heat and buildings strategy, the answer is technology. As technology comes in, we will find that there are more affordable ways of heating our homes. My personal view is very much in line with the Government's strategy. Significant money—more than £100 million, I think—has been committed to trying to work out whether hydrogen will be the answer, but nuclear is part of it. A range of strategies are being adopted, looked at and implemented, with taxpayers' money devoted to them, in addition to heat pumps. They are not the whole solution, but merely a part of it.

As regards the travel guidance, I am delighted that the Opposition are supportive of the simplification of the rules. That seems to me a good thing. I sometimes think that the hon. Lady makes points that I would in opposition and that I respond as she would in government. The truth is that obviously the Opposition call for rules to be relaxed earlier, but the Government have to work at a sensible pace to ensure that things are done at the right time and cautiously, as we continue to be in a pandemic.

I am delighted to inform the hon. Lady that the Online Safety Bill will complete its draft scrutiny in December. This is really important, because the draft Bill is already available—it is there for all and sundry to see, to look at and to consider. The Joint Committee on the draft Bill will come up with its wise views before Christmas; we will then be able to look at them and ensure not just a good Bill, but a brilliant Bill—the best Bill, an ideal Bill. That is a very important part of scrutiny.

I look forward to revealing next week the Second Reading of an important Bill on 3 November.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): For all of us, business questions will not be the same without Sir David, and nor will our pre-recess Adjournment debates. May I suggest, as a matter for the House, that we call the summer pre-recess Adjournment debate the Sir David Amess debate as a tribute?

During Navaratri, Hindu communities in Bangladesh were targeted by lynch mobs. They were brutally attacked and many were murdered. Indeed, an ISKCON—International Society for Krishna Consciousness—temple in Bangladesh was targeted and partly destroyed. Protecting religious minorities is one of the key roles of Government, and there will be a demonstration this weekend by Hindu organisations across the country, so could we have a statement from the Government about what they will do to ensure that religious minorities are protected in Bangladesh and around the world?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this concerning matter to the attention of the House. The Government are concerned about the recent violence directed against Hindu Durga Puja celebrations across various districts in Bangladesh. Her Majesty's Government continue to engage with the Government of Bangladesh on the importance of freedom of religion or belief, which remains a priority for the UK Government. I am glad to be able to inform my hon. Friend that the British high commissioner to Bangladesh has publicly expressed his concern and his condolences to the victims of violence, and the UK's support for those working for religious tolerance and harmony in Bangladesh and around the world. In addition to that, I will pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Scottish National party spokesman, Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This has been a rotten first week back, and I think we are all still struggling to come to terms with and comprehend all the issues surrounding the killing of our friend and colleague David Amess, as well as grieving for the loss

of James Brokenshire. The Leader of the House was absolutely right to pay those further tributes. I have been doing this job for nearly six years, and I think that missing Sir David at business questions is something we all feel profoundly today. Let us hope that we never have another week like this one.

Many of us will be leaving to return to our constituencies in the next 24 hours with a greater sense of anxiety, and a greater sense of the responsibility that we all feel for the staff who work with us. I think that what Members are looking for more than anything else is clear advice, bordering on instruction, about how we should do our business in our constituencies. We were grateful for last night's statement from the Home Secretary, but will the Leader of the House commit himself to further statements, and ongoing information and clear advice from the police and the security services, to acquaint Members with what we can do to keep ourselves and our staff safe?

Another safety issue has arisen on our return: the ongoing comic appearance in this place of those on one side of the House wearing masks and those on the other side not wearing them at all. Yesterday the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care said that we should wear them in crowded and enclosed places. He even went so far as to say that Members of Parliament should be setting an example by wearing them, so come on, for goodness' sake—set that example! I am looking around the Chamber now, and I am looking at my Conservative colleagues. I do not like picking on them, because I consider that so unnecessary, but I think that four out of 14 are wearing masks this morning. That is a little bit better than what we saw before the conference recess, but we must do better than this. We are going to be back with compulsory mask-wearing, we are going to be back with further restrictions—we are going to follow the countries of mainland Europe, because we are way ahead in terms of infections. We are going to have to do something, so let us do it now. Let us set that example.

Mr Speaker was absolutely right to castigate the Government this morning for making major policy announcements outside the House. Today we are in a ridiculous situation: there will be an urgent question and a statement on the same topic. That cannot happen again. Indeed, I would go further: I would bring the Secretaries of State or other Ministers responsible for this to the Bar of the House to apologise for their disrespect if they dare to make announcements outside this Chamber.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Bar of the House, interestingly, is a gift from Jamaica, as Members will see if they pull it out; but I do not think anyone has been called to the Bar of the House recently.

I think the issue really is, what is a major policy announcement? It was the Government's view that the announcement made yesterday was an entirely routine announcement. Major policy announcements do come to the Floor of the House, but it is important to understand that there is a balance involved in the business of the House. Given the number of statements today, and the urgent question, it would be perfectly reasonable if the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee were to complain that his important debates were being squeezed; and this is an issue that we face every day of every week. Should we ensure that the business of the

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

House—often important legislative business—has its time protected, or should we bring every possible Government announcement to the Floor of the House? There has to be that balance, which I think that, by and large, is got right.

As for the question of mask-wearing, I responded to the shadow Leader of the House on that, but I will say that there is no advice to wear masks in workplaces, and that the advice on crowded spaces refers to crowded spaces containing people whom we do not know. We on this side of the House know each other. It may be that the hon. Gentleman does not mix with his own side. He may wish to keep himself in his personal bubble, away from other SNP Members. I normally find them extraordinarily charming, but the hon. Gentleman may not take this catholic view of his right hon. and hon. Friends. I sympathise if that is the case, but we on this side have a more convivial, fraternal spirit, and are therefore following the guidance of Her Majesty's Government.

I want to finish with another important point that the hon. Gentleman raised, and I have left this to the end because this is not the politicised bit. This has been the saddest week, I think, for any of us in Parliament. It has been a terrible week because of the deaths that have happened and the memory of Jo Cox, which was in itself a terrible time for the House and for politics. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that Members want very clear advice. The Home Secretary is working closely with the Speaker, and local police authorities will have contacted every Member. Many of them are getting in touch with further advice. I think that advice “bordering on instruction” is what we are looking for, because there are many forms of safety available to Members, but they do not all necessarily know what they are. Of course I could not say in the Chamber what they are, unless we were to sit in private, for the obvious reason that we do not want people who are hostile to us to know what they are. Information is going to be important, as is working with our local police forces, but we also want to know what the real level of risk is. I do not feel that that is yet clear. It might take some time to become clear, but it needs to be communicated to Members along with all the support that is available. I am in agreement with the hon. Gentleman on this, and the Home Secretary and the Speaker will work together try to ensure that Members are properly informed.

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend whether the Government will find time for a debate on the planned decommissioning of nuclear power stations across the country? As the most affordable large-scale low-carbon energy source currently available to the UK, nuclear energy must play a significant role in meeting our climate change commitments, including net zero by 2050. Although the Hartlepool power station is one of EDF's most productive power stations, supplying low-carbon electricity to 2.3 million homes and providing 730 high-skilled, high-wage jobs in my constituency, it is set to be decommissioned by 2024. A debate on this topic would allow me to continue to make the case for a new nuclear reactor for Hartlepool, which would supply my constituency with thousands of new high-skilled jobs and ensure the success of levelling up and building back better in the north-east.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think there may be opportunities to discuss nuclear power in this House in the not-too-distant future. It is an important subject, as nuclear has a key role to play in helping us to achieve our net zero objectives. That is why we are building Hinkley Point C in God's own county of Somerset, which will provide around 7% of the U.K.'s current electricity demand. The community of Hartlepool can be very proud of its production of low-carbon electricity for over 30 years, just as it can be proud of having elected my hon. Friend.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I echo the comments that have been reiterated time and again about Sir David Amess. He was previously a member of the Backbench Business Committee, and he was a regular customer with us after he left the Committee. He will be sadly missed.

We have business pencilled in for Thursday 4 November, and I thank the Leader of the House for announcing that we have that date, but we are still waiting for confirmation from the sponsoring Members that they are free to take those opportunities. I also have a couple of provisional dates for the Leader of the House's diary. On Thursday 18 November, we provisionally have a debate on the impact of alcohol in society, to coincide with Alcohol Awareness Week. The second provisional debate that day would be on International Men's Day, which is on the following day, 19 November. The week after that, we have provisional acceptance of a debate on freedom of religion or belief, to mark the 40th anniversary of the UN declaration, which falls during that week. My fellow member of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), talked about religious intolerance, and it is important that this House should have an opportunity to debate that on the Floor of the House. To do that at the time of the 40th anniversary would be very welcome.

I also echo my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and ask the Leader of the House to urge his Cabinet colleagues to get their Departments to respond to MPs' inquiries in a timely and complete way. Particularly from the Home Office, we are getting holding responses after eight weeks to say that the Department is “looking at it.”

We are also getting non-responses from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in a situation where heavy goods vehicle drivers have passed tests and had medicals but, by the time the process has finished, their medicals have lapsed and they have to go through the process again. This is keeping qualified HGV drivers off the road, so it is urgent. I raised the matter with the Leader of the House well before the summer recess and I said it was a looming crisis, and I am afraid to say that a Government Department is not helping that process.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Government agencies have a great responsibility to be responsive to Members of this House. What the hon. Gentleman says is very important, and I will take it up with the DVLA immediately after this session.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out the forthcoming anniversaries, which is useful to know for planning, although I must confess that I am slightly disappointed. Today is one of our great anniversaries, the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar, and for some

reason it has passed the Backbench Business Committee's mind not to spend the rest of the day celebrating Nelson's famous victory.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Our wonderful colleague Sir David Amess was the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on epilepsy, a cause that he championed with great energy. The Independent Fetal Anti-Convulsant Trust campaigns to raise awareness of sodium valproate, a drug taken by epileptics that can have terribly profound implications if taken during pregnancy. Yesterday the World Health Organisation announced that it is adopting In-FACT's recommendations on the use of valproate, but here in the UK we are still waiting for the full implementation of the recommendations of the Cumberlege report. Will my right hon. Friend please find time for a debate to understand why we are still having to campaign for redress, more than a year after the publication of that report?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Cumberlege report was an important report covering a number of pharmaceuticals. I cannot promise my right hon. Friend an immediate debate, so I would encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate on this subject. I am, as it happens, looking forward to meeting the noble Baroness Cumberlege next week, and I will discuss with her the issues that have been raised.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The Leader of the House will know that a child born this week in my constituency will lose more days of education, probably have more ill health and will die younger than a child born in his constituency. I say that not because I want to level down the opportunities for his constituents but because I would like us to have a meaningful debate about what levelling up really means for health, education and the things that make a material difference to a constituency such as Rochdale.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is becoming an advocate for the levelling-up campaign, which is about helping people. Yes, it is about health, but it is also about improving skills so that people have a chance to get better, higher-skilled jobs so that they are able to be more prosperous. It is about the towns fund, which ensures that towns that have been left behind have the opportunity to do better. It is about the money that is being spent in the NHS to ensure that the backlog that has come about because of covid is dealt with. Levelling up is about ensuring that all the effort of the Government, the spending of taxpayers' money, is directed towards ensuring that those who have been left behind have an opportunity to do as well as everybody else.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, there is one way into west Somerset and one way out. That road has been completely blocked for the past couple of weeks due to work that had to be done. It was an absolute shambles. The signage was wrong and everything went wrong. Unfortunately, we need time in this place to ensure that, where major diversions have to be put in place, the statutory obligations of Highways England are carried out. To put it in context, if Alfred had had this problem he would still be stuck on the levels and would have been diverted via Edinburgh. Can we please have time to discuss this matter?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is an important matter. Diversions do sometimes send people on peculiar routes, so it is always a good idea to have a look at a map. I think my hon. Friend can probably navigate his way around Somerset without resorting to a boat.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): May I add my voice to all those who mourn the loss of Sir David Amess and James Brokenshire? Across Parliament, we have all lost two wonderful colleagues. In the words of the late Jo Cox, times like this remind us that there is so much more that unites us than divides us.

There is a shortage of bus drivers in Bath and across the UK. That is partly because of Brexit, but it is also because of the Government's decision to poach bus drivers to fill the gaps in HGV drivers. That has caused innumerable disruptions to my constituents: four consecutive buses do not turn up; routes are being cancelled; and drivers are working well over their hours. So may we have a statement from the Transport Secretary on what the Government are doing to solve this crisis of their own making and to bring back the buses in Bath?

Mr Rees-Mogg: To say that this is anything to do with Brexit is absolute nonsense. There is a shortage of more than 100,000 lorry drivers in Poland and of about 50,000 in Germany. There is a shortage of lorry drivers in California, which has not recently been a member of the European Union, as far as I am aware; California may have some funny policies but it has never had one that funny. The problem with driving in Bath is that the council has made it absolutely impossible to drive around Bath; there is a war on the motorist, and I cannot think why anyone would try to drive in Bath.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The biggest single item in my inbox is constituents telling me about the challenges in getting face-to-face appointments with their GPs. They tell me about lengthy queues on outdated telephone booking systems. One constituent even told me that the NHS had refused to give them details of the guidelines on refusing face-to-face appointments. The Government have announced some measures in the winter access fund. May we have a debate to consider their effectiveness in dealing with this serious problem?

Mr Rees-Mogg: MPs ought to be giving face-to-face appointments to those who need them and to be ensuring that people can get through reasonably efficiently on a telephone line if a telephone appointment is what the patient wants. The NHS has been clear: every GP practice must provide face-to-face as well as telephone and online appointments. That is supported by the Government. There will be a Westminster Hall debate next week on GP appointment availability, and I encourage my hon. Friend to contribute to it.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Leader of the House will know from his work as a constituency Member how much charities and voluntary groups have done during the pandemic, so I was appalled to receive a letter from my local Girlguiding groups informing me that HSBC has decided to start charging for charity accounts. I am sure he would agree that it simply is not acceptable for large corporate banks to charge for groups that do great work, support young women and girls into their futures and, importantly, do not have masses of

[Chris Elmore]

funds in their accounts. This move makes it almost impossible for them to continue banking with HSBC. Will he find time for a Treasury Minister to issue a statement on what the Treasury can do to encourage banks to stop charging charities, which really are the backbone of many of our communities?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful for that question, as that is an important point. Banks do have, as do we all, a social responsibility. Most banks would be proud to support local charities, and I am slightly surprised that the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation does not wish to support local charities in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. As regards time for a debate, I think that it would be in order to mention this matter in the Budget debate. I have just announced several days for that, so he will have plenty of opportunity.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): In 2018, the independent leader of Ashfield District Council ripped up the draft local plan, and promised to deliver a new plan to build 8,000 houses over 15 years and protect our green belt. Two weeks ago he published his new plan, which totally obliterates our green spaces. In a desperate attempt to save face, he is now the only council leader in the country to write to the Prime Minister to see how he can save our green-belt land. This staggering incompetence has left my local residents furious, so does the Leader of the House think that a debate on planning in this Chamber would serve as a good reminder to local authorities that it is their job to decide where we build houses, not the Prime Minister's?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right to say that local authorities have responsibilities, which they should not try to pass on to other people. Local authorities are prevented from altering the green belt boundary unless in exceptional circumstances; that is the point of the green belt. So when developing their local plan, they must consult local people and use this availability only in exceptional circumstances. It is their responsibility and their feet must be held to the fire, but there was a Westminster Hall debate on Tuesday on the inclusion of green-belt land, so this has been discussed in the House recently.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Six months ago, my constituent, who has a medical condition, returned his licence to the DVLA for renewal. Six months on, neither he nor his doctor have heard a word from it. This is possibly due to a dearth of medical advisers recruited by DVLA. As the Leader of the House can imagine, this is causing difficulties in terms of my constituent's work and social obligations. I am sure the Leader of the House will agree that this is not good enough. Will he therefore advise me on the best way forward to ensure a response from the DVLA and the speedy return of my constituent's licence?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The previous Speaker used to say, when points were raised that answered themselves, that the Member concerned knew parliamentary procedure so well that very little intervention was required. The appearance in *Hansard* of the hon. Lady's question will go a long way to ensuring a response from the DVLA,

but just to help it along its way, I shall send a copy of *Hansard* to the DVLA to remind it that it must respond to right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is hard to believe that I was part of a tribute act, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Purglove) and Councillor Helen Harrison, when a leadership contest for the Conservative party was being run. We ran the "Back Boris" tour. We went to areas where the Prime Minister could not come and we had a substitute star. When David Amess found out about that, he was determined to get us to Southend. On that occasion, the star was the Leader of the House. We went to Iveagh Hall, Leigh-on-Sea, and it was packed, with people almost hanging from the rafters—we had everyone there. He made a wonderful speech and we overran. A lady had baked a cake for him, but because of all the events and how well David spoke we dashed off without taking it.

We dashed off to St Albans and the wonderful Anne Main. David rang me when we were on the motorway haring down to St Albans. He was desperately unhappy that the Leader of the House had not got his cake, not for that reason in itself, but because David felt he had let down his constituent who had baked the cake. David was really concerned and somehow or other he arranged to get that cake to St Albans before we left there. Taking into account what was said earlier, I wonder whether the Leader of the House could mark the pre-recess debate in the summer as the David Amess day, in response to such a kind and decent man.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I remember the incident very well. My children then benefited from the cake, which they enjoyed very much. What was so striking about the event at Iveagh Hall was, again, how loved by his constituents David was. That is what we all want, is it not? All of us want to have our own constituents on our side, and David had achieved that and was therefore, in my mind, a model of what a constituency MP wants to be. I am the servant of the House, and if the House would like the summer Adjournment debate to be the David Amess debate, that is what it will become.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I associate myself with the remarks by the Leader of the House and all other right hon. and hon. Members about Sir David Amess and James Brokenshire.

We need a debate or statement on British citizens being held prisoner abroad. I have raised many times with the Leader of the House the case of my constituent Luke Symons, who is still held captive by the Houthis in Sanaa. His family have recently received worrying reports about his welfare. May we have a statement on, or will the new Foreign Secretary participate in a debate about, British prisoners held abroad? Now that we have a new Foreign Secretary, will the Government redouble their efforts to get Luke and the other British prisoners unjustly held abroad released?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have no up-to-date information on Luke Symons, but I will pass on to the Foreign Secretary the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised. There are Foreign Office questions on 26 October, so I encourage right hon. and hon. Members to raise such issues with

the Foreign Secretary then. Whenever these matters are raised at business questions, I pass them on to the Foreign Secretary, so I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments and his desire for more information.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I am sure that, like me, the Leader of the House will have welcomed the Prime Minister's comments about the protection of the green belt in his excellent speech in Manchester earlier this month. Like a number of other areas throughout the UK, Warrington is currently consulting on its draft local plan, which is, as the Leader of the House will know, the point at which green belt can be released for future development. In my constituency, thousands of homes are planned on green belt, so may we have an urgent debate in Government time to give councils guidance on the local planning process and the need to prioritise town centre regeneration and brownfield usage ahead of destroying the green belt for future development?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I heard my hon. Friend earlier promoting gin from his constituency; I am glad that he did not confuse his question and ask for gin distilleries on the green belt, which would have made for a different tone.

When developing their local plan, local authorities are prevented from altering the green belt boundary, unless in exceptional circumstances, and they must consult local people. It is of course right to use brownfield sites first and to try to redevelop town centres, and a number of permissive rights—permitted development rights—have been provided to make that easier for developers to do. That will help home ownership, which is a fundamental objective of the Government and is what people want. Our constituents want to own their own home and Governments must try to facilitate that, which means house building but, yes of course, on brownfield first.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Harkness Roses and We Too Built Britain are today launching the first rose ever to be dedicated to an ethnic minority person in the UK. The rose is named after John Ystumllyn, the first ever recorded black person in north Wales, who was taken from Africa as a young boy in the 1740s and spent his adulthood in Criccieth, where he worked as a gardener. His marriage to a local woman, Margaret Gruffydd, is the first recorded mixed marriage in Wales. In celebration of Black History Month—and of gardeners everywhere—will there be sufficient time in the House to debate the host of black history stories, as well as to ensure that the John Ystumllyn rose blossoms as a symbol of friendship, love, kindness and community?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, and to Harkness Roses. This is a really heart-warming story, and as Members we should all want to plant the John Ystumllyn rose in our own gardens, as a symbol, perhaps, of what we have debated this week. As the right hon. Lady puts it, we do actually have friendship across the boundaries, and that is important. We may disagree very fiercely on policy and we may fight our battles in this Chamber energetically—and so we should, because the issues that we discuss are important—but if the Ystumllyn rose could be the rose of friendship across political parties, it is something that we could plant with pride.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): On many occasions I have said in debates in the House that I regard Cleethorpes as the premier resort of the east coast. It will come as no surprise to the House that David Amess did not agree with me, and we had some light-hearted exchanges on that subject. Members will recall that in his tribute to Sir David on Monday, the Prime Minister referred to an unnamed individual who, like Sir David, thought that Southend was better than Cleethorpes. Clearly, I disagree, but some people obviously think that we need some levelling up in Cleethorpes, so I urge my right hon. Friend to pass on to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities the message that he should look favourably on the bid by North East Lincolnshire Council to achieve that.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thought that, being the great promoter of Cleethorpes that he is, my hon. Friend was going to ask for funding to build a cathedral in Cleethorpes, because a cathedral is a normal requirement for city status. I have a feeling that that might be the next campaign to ensure that Cleethorpes and Southend manage to be on an equal competitive footing.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): On Tuesday, I presented a petition relating to the closure of the NatWest bank branch in Crouch End and Hornsey—I am sure I am not the first Member to have presented a petition on a branch closure—and I have now learned that Lloyds Banking Group will close its bank just up the road in Muswell Hill. Since 2015, there have been 50 bank branch closures per calendar month throughout the UK, and our high streets are turning into deserts. This will affect 8 million branch users who are on a low income, disabled or need the cash for their business. Please may we have a debate, perhaps with a Treasury Minister, on stopping this haemorrhage of banks from our high streets so that we can have genuine confidence that they can be vibrant places?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Obviously, banks make their own commercial decisions, but the Government are committed to ensuring that there is access to cash, recognising that it remains important to millions throughout the UK, and so have committed to legislating to protect access to cash and to ensuring that the UK's cash infrastructure, which obviously includes bank branches, is sustainable in the longer term. That issue will inevitably be discussed in the House when the legislation is introduced, but it can of course be raised in the broader Budget debate next week.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): Like many Members, I am deeply concerned about the reports in recent days of injection by spiking. This is a completely horrendous act and we have heard harrowing stories from dozens of young girls throughout the country. I am pleased that the Home Secretary has requested an urgent update from the police, but may we have a debate in Government time to discuss these crimes and ensure that we tackle the perpetrators without delay?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This really is a very concerning matter. It comes down to the whole approach that needs to be taken to tackle violence against women and girls. The Government do have a strategy on that and there is an extra £5 million for the safety of women at night fund, in addition to the £25 million safer streets fund. We are

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also increasing penalties for stalking and harassment, and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been passed. It is all about ensuring that our society is safe for women and girls and taking the legislative and policy steps that are necessary to make it a safer place.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I associate myself with the Leader of the House's comments about James Brokenshire, who was the Immigration Minister when I first arrived in the House and helped with cases, and, of course, the great Sir David Amess, who always gave me, as someone who led for the SNP in summer Adjournment debates, support, advice and encouragement, no matter what the politics.

Data shows that in the United Kingdom, out of 282,000 tonnes of surplus food, just 9% is donated to food aid charities for human consumption, and it is estimated that 80,000 tonnes that could be donated for human consumption is not. May we have a debate and a statement on food waste and surplus food, to address this serious problem?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. I must confess that I was not aware of those figures, but it does seem extremely wasteful and it would be beneficial if food that is perfectly usable were used. I will take the matter up with the relevant Department.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Please can we have the opportunity to challenge Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on what they are doing to ensure that state pensions reach individuals on the date they reach pension age? I ask this because increasing numbers of Newport East constituents are reporting mistakes and long delays, often waiting months for their pension, despite applying well in advance, and it is causing hardship.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very concerned to hear what the hon. Lady says. It is obviously important that people receive their pension on the correct date. She, like many other Members of Parliament, is providing a useful service to her constituents by getting in touch with the DWP. I will pass on what has been said, but this is something that should happen correctly as a matter of routine.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Fife Council is one of over 90% of local authorities in Scotland that have given firm commitments of provision of housing for Afghan nationals and others who have had to be evacuated from Afghanistan recently. So I was very concerned to read a few days ago that a Minister in the Home Office, during a private press briefing, had said that the figure in Scotland was just over 50% and that only 18 or 19 out of 32 councils had given that commitment. Can we have a statement from the Home Office, first, to update Members on the fantastic work that has been done across these islands to support those who have been evacuated from Afghanistan, and, in particular, to put the record straight on just how comprehensive the support from Scotland's local authorities has been?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I obviously do not know what was said in private meetings that I was not at. I would never put too much weight on gossip from private meetings; it

is not always accurate. We should be proud of what councils have done. Having had a pop at Bath and North East Somerset Council earlier for making driving in Bath completely impossible, it has been extremely good as a council in terms of immediately volunteering to help take Afghan nationals and that is, I think, a spirit that has arisen across the land.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, York CVS launched York's Poverty Truth Commission and, tonight, York Labour will be urging the council to make York a Right to Food city. The levels of poverty in my constituency are rising really sharply, not least because of the recent cut to universal credit. Can we have a debate on poverty in urban areas and the impact that that is having on our constituents?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Since 2010, absolute poverty has fallen by 700,000. That is a very significant decline and 650,000 fewer children live in workless households than did in 2010. That is the key way out of poverty. Getting people into work is the key way out of poverty. We have a record number of vacancies. Employment has got back to pre-pandemic levels and an extra £500 million has been made available for people who, over this winter, may be in need because of the continuing consequences of the pandemic, so the Government are doing absolutely the right things. But the key way out of poverty is economic growth and economic success. It is not any other route.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Building on the question earlier from the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), I have been contacted by many constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran who have just reached state pension age, but have faced considerable delays in receiving their state pension payments. There are 2.1 million pensioners in poverty across the UK, so, for them, the state pension is the most important source of income and these delays to payments are a particular cruelty to the WASPI women who have already had their state pension age increased. I wrote to the DWP Secretary of State about this on 8 August and not yet received a response. Will the Leader of the House make a statement setting out what investigations he will undertake into these delays? Will he use his good offices to ensure that state pension payments are made in a timely manner?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Since I have been doing this job over the past couple of years or so, I have thought that one of the most useful parts of business questions is that, if problems are arising and affecting a number of constituents, this is an opportunity to raise them. On some occasions, a number of Members have raised the same point, which tends to indicate that an issue is of a degree of seriousness and will need Government attention. This has now come up twice. I do not know whether it is affecting other hon. and right hon. Members—*[Interruption.]* I see a certain amount of nodding. I will therefore take this up as a matter of extreme urgency after this session with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Leader of the House has very close links with the finance sector, so I am sure that he will have followed very closely the news that the Government are set to cut taxes on the

profits made by banks. Surely, at a time when ordinary people are facing such a tax hike, any such cuts to taxes on the profits of banks would be completely wrong. Obviously, a Budget is on its way, but can we have a Government statement specifically on this issue because it is something that the public are alarmed about and that this House should be very alarmed about, too.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman has pointed out that a Budget is on the way.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Planning is a much under-appreciated skill that some people think is beneath them, but, as a former network programme manager, I know that it is critical to getting anything done. Can we have a debate on planning and the Prime Minister, so that he will not again announce the date of critical legislation—the Online Safety Bill—and then U-turn on that date within a couple of hours? The many people suffering online hate will not thank him for not having a plan. Could the Leader of the House confirm whether the Prime Minister’s commitment to criminal sanctions will outlast his commitment to bring legislation to this House before Christmas?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising the point about the Online Safety Bill, which I referred to earlier. It is undergoing detailed scrutiny as a draft Bill. This is really important because this is complex legislation. We have to deal with the online harms issue. We also have to protect freedom of speech. We need to hold the online service companies to account for what they publish and that report will come forward in December. We know that the plan of the Joint Committee is to have its report issued then. That will be the basis for legislation. It is following the proper, suitable plan. This is the parliamentary process—lots of it is written down in Erskine May, a copy of which I can see not too far from me—so the Government’s planning is exactly as we would expect it to be.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Leader of the House consider providing time for a debate on the persecution of religion or belief and minorities in Pakistan? Last week, the Pakistan Government rejected a Bill that was designed to prevent abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian and other minority under-aged girls from among Pakistan’s minority religious or belief communities. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is right, proper and timely for this House to consider the plight of girls in Pakistan as the Pakistan Government violate their rights, and shirk their international obligations and constitutional provisions regarding the rights of minorities?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As always, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. His question is similar in principle to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about protecting the rights of religious minorities who face persecution in various parts of the world. I share the hon. Gentleman’s concerns, as he knows. Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right. Last year, the Foreign Office published its “Human Rights and Democracy” report, which noted significant concern about the treatment of Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan following the global coverage of the trial of Asia Bibi for blasphemy. The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the severity and scale of violations and abuses of freedom of religion or belief in many parts of the world. Her Majesty’s Government remain committed to the global effort to support the most vulnerable members of society irrespective of race, religion and ethnicity. I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman’s points are passed on to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and that what can be done will be done.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I echo the sentiments by the Leader of the House about our two colleagues, James Brokenshire and Sir David Amess—two exemplary constituency MPs, who any MP would wish to emulate.

An issue of particular concern in my constituency in recent months is 5G mobile phone masts. While both I and many others understand the need for greater coverage and connectivity, my constituents and I share concerns about engagement on mast locations. Will the Leader of the House schedule a debate in Government time about the requirements on telecoms companies to meaningfully engage with local communities when planning these projects?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is a real difficulty in this, in that we need to improve connectivity. When I am at home in Somerset and my mobile signal gives out again, I begin to think, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there were a 5G mast not so far away, so that I could actually get some signal?” On the other hand, local communities need to be consulted and we need to take people with us as the systems are rolled out. Therefore, it is all about getting the balance right. We do not want to hold back business or communications, but, equally, we want to reassure communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement.

Covid-19 Update

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): With permission, I would like to make a statement on coronavirus.

Even through the warm summer days, we drew up our autumn and winter plan. We used the time to plan and prepare, because we know that covid-19 thrives in colder weather. With winter now around the corner, covid-19 is re-emerging, as expected. It is clear that this pandemic is far from over: new cases of the virus are high; the pressure on our hospitals is steadily growing; and, sadly, we are seeing more than 100 deaths a day. We must therefore be prompt and proportionate in how we enact our plan. We will not be implementing our plan B of contingency measures at this point, but we will stay vigilant and ready for all eventualities, even while pursuing plan A to its full extent.

Vaccines are our first line of defence. Eight-six per cent. of everyone in the UK over the age of 12 has received at least one dose and 79% of people have had at least two doses. Two steps naturally follow from this. The first is to plug any gaps in the wall, by doing all we can to get vaccines into the unvaccinated. There are 4.7 million people over the age of 18 in England who have not accepted the vaccine, so we are working hard to encourage those who can take it to do so. It is never too late to come forward. We are also working with parents and schools to ensure that this life-saving protection is extended to over-12s.

Our vaccines continue to save countless lives, but early evidence shows that their protection can wane over time, especially in older and more vulnerable people. Our second step has therefore been to reinforce our wall of defence still further. That means third doses, not only for the immunosuppressed, but booster shots for all those in phase 1 of our vaccination programme. We have given more than 4 million third doses and boosters in England so far. That is good, but it is not good enough. I want all those eligible to come forward. More than 85% of people have done it twice; there is no good reason not to do it again.

Those who are over 50 or in another priority group, and who had their second jab more than six months ago, will be eligible for a booster. The NHS will send an invite once an individual is eligible. If the invitation has not arrived despite a person becoming eligible, they should contact the national booking service. Boosters can be booked online or by calling 119. There is zero room for complacency when it comes to this deadly disease and we all have our part to play.

Vaccines are not our only line of defence. Antivirals can stop a mild disease from becoming more serious. Our antivirals taskforce has been looking for the most promising new drugs to speed up their development and manufacture. Yesterday, we signed a landmark deal for hundreds of thousands of doses of two new antivirals from Pfizer and Merck Sharp & Dohme. Should the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approve their use, we will work with the NHS to make sure that they quickly get to those who need them.

There are, of course, further lines of defence, which form plan B of our autumn and winter plan. We have always sought to maintain measures that are proportionate

to the stage of the pandemic that we are in. We detailed plan B so that people and businesses would know what to expect. It includes face coverings in certain settings, encouragement to work at home where possible, and covid certification. None of us wishes to implement these measures, but they are clearly preferable to having to close businesses or enforce further lockdowns. I recognise that vaccine certification is of particular interest to my colleagues in this House. As set out in our plan, we would seek to provide a vote in Parliament ahead of any regulations coming into force.

But at this time, we remain on plan A, and we will continue to monitor the situation carefully. We are identifying new variants all the time, including a new version of the delta variant, known as AY.4.2, which seems to be growing in prevalence. Equally, we are monitoring the situation in our hospitals. I thank everyone in the NHS and social care for everything they are doing to keep us safe. Today I can confirm to the House that we are making £162.5 million of additional funding available for social care through a workforce retention and recruitment fund to help local authorities to work with providers to boost staffing and support existing care workers through the winter.

In closing, I want to underline just how many things remain within the control of each and every one of us. When we are offered vaccines for covid-19, we can take up that offer. When we are offered a flu jab, we can take that too. When we have symptoms of covid-19, we must isolate and get tested. Even if we are well, we can wear face coverings, meet outdoors, let the air in when we are indoors, regularly wash our hands and make rapid tests part of our weekly routine. Let me be clear: rapid tests are a vital tool. A quarter of the positive cases that we are identifying at the moment come from lateral flow tests. They also help to give people peace of mind when they visit vulnerable people, such as grandparents.

Even before covid, winter was always a tough time for people across our country, for the NHS and for social care. We have another tough winter ahead. But we have a plan; we are prepared. If things have to change, measures will be prompt and proportionate. We all have a part to play in protecting each other and the people we love. I commend this statement to the House.

12.46 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I often have a sense of déjà vu when responding to these covid statements, but I feel it particularly acutely today. I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. She, of course, has had advance sight of my questions. May I put to her again some of the questions that she did not have—or perhaps did not take—the opportunity to answer earlier? Perhaps she can tell the House the answers now.

Are Ministers ruling out a so-called plan C, where household mixing is banned? Are they ruling out lockdowns such as those we saw in Leicester, Bolton and so on? And are they ruling out a return to regional tiers? Is the Department looking at plans to introduce regional tiers? Will she also now tell us the criteria that trigger plan B? We did not get an answer to that question earlier either. Why not just make mask wearing—on public transport, for example—mandatory now? Yesterday, the Secretary of State talked about the importance of mask wearing. Why do we not just get on with it?

I am afraid that the vaccination programme is stalling. On current trends, the booster programme will not be completed until March next year. At one point back in the spring, we were doing about 800,000 vaccines a day. Why does the Minister not now set a target of 500,000 booster jabs a day so that we can complete the programme by Christmas? We are currently only doing about 165,000 jabs a day. Instead of blaming people for not coming forward, will she not only make sure that everyone eligible is invited and has a letter, but allow those who need a booster—or, indeed, the immunosuppressed who need the third dose—to go to a walk-in centre or a pop-up centre, rather than making them book online as they have to at the moment?

Children's vaccination rates are also low, at only about 17%. Of course, we have seen years of cuts to numbers of school nurses and health visitors, who help with the children's vaccination programme. The rate of infection among children is running at about 10,000 a day. Will the Minister mobilise retired medics and school nurses to return to schools and carry out vaccinations?

The Minister talked about the importance of the flu jab, but people's flu jabs are getting cancelled. Will she guarantee a flu jab to all those who need and want one before December?

Let me put a question to the Minister that I did not put to her earlier. About 20% of covid patients in hospital—or one in six, actually, on the latest figures—are unvaccinated pregnant women. Will she guarantee a helpline so that expectant mothers can access proper advice? Will she deal with some of the anti-vax nonsense that we sometimes see spread on social media? Will she establish a target for driving up vaccination rates, including priority access for expectant mothers?

Ministers can have plan A, they can have plan B and they can have plans C, D, E and F, but infectious people cannot afford to isolate and transmission will not be broken until we fix sick pay as well. Indeed, there will be those who will fear that getting their booster or their second or third dose could lead to a couple of days of feeling unwell because of the side effects and will not take it because they will not be able to afford two or three days off work as a consequence. We really need to fix sick pay as we go into this next stage of dealing with covid.

There we have it: those were six straightforward questions for the Minister, and I am looking forward to six straightforward answers—because the wall of defence, I am afraid, is crumbling; vaccination is stalling; and we are heading into a winter of misery. This vaccination programme needs fixing now.

Maggie Throup: I would like to reassure the House and anybody who is listening that our wall of defence is extremely strong. I am really proud of all the scientists who developed the vaccines that helped to build our wall of defence, and all the NHS workers and volunteers who have helped to deliver it and are continuing to develop it.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about whether people can access booster jabs. Comparing the number of community pharmacies, for example, there were 1,032 in phase 1 and there are now 1,049 taking part in our activities to provide the booster jab. It is a bit disingenuous

of him to say that we are not going fast enough, as there are actually plenty of opportunities for people to get their booster jab.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what would trigger plan B. As I said earlier, we are on plan A. There are numerous factors that we could go into about triggering plan B, but we are still on plan A, and we can still go further with plan A.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly mentions the importance of pregnant women getting the jab. Only last week there was a big push from the NHS to get the message out that it is extremely safe for pregnant women to get a covid vaccine—encouraging them to do that, because it is protecting them from getting this deadly disease. There has been a high rate of hospitalisation for those who are pregnant and have not been vaccinated, and we need to encourage more pregnant women to get the jab.

The right hon. Gentleman mentions plan C. I saw that story earlier and checked it out, and it does not have any foundation. We are always open to alternatives, and quite rightly so, because as a Government it would be irresponsible of us not to be looking at every alternative. I hope he is reassured that, as I said earlier, we are still on plan A. By encouraging everybody who has not already had their booster jab to come forward, we want plan A to be successful.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned statutory sick pay. I am extremely proud that this Government, through the Coronavirus Act 2020, introduced statutory sick pay throughout this emergency from day one, alongside many other measures that were put in place to support people, whether businesses or individuals, throughout this global pandemic.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I, too, have had the great pleasure of asking a question of the Minister this morning, but there is no shortage of fascinating and important questions to ask on this topic. My second question of the day is really a follow-up to what we discussed earlier. The heart of the issue we face now is the fact that our vaccine immunity is beginning to wear down. That seems to be what people such as Professor Neil Ferguson believe is the reason we have higher case rates and death rates than countries such as France and Germany. I just want to understand this: given that about a third of the over-80s and 40% of the over-50s who are eligible for a booster jab have not taken it up, and that our vaccination rates are lower among teenagers than other European countries, what are we doing, other than encouraging, pleading and exhorting people to take the vaccines, to actually get these rates up? None of us wants to go to plan B, and I understand the Government's reluctance to do that, but nor am I convinced that just exhorting people will be enough.

Maggie Throup: It is good to be asked a further question by my right hon. Friend. I would like to reassure the House that vaccines continue to be effective in preventing serious illness. Current evidence suggests that the AstraZeneca vaccine is at just under 80% effectiveness at five months, and that is brilliant. Even though effectiveness is waning, it is not dropping off a cliff. That is why, before levels get lower, we are encouraging people to come forward for their boosters.

[Maggie Throup]

He asks what more we are doing to get more people to do that. For 12 to 15-year-olds, until now they have been able to claim their first jab through the School Age Immunisation Service. We are now opening up the national booking service for 12 to 15-year-olds so that they can go along with their parents and get their jabs at the centres throughout England. I am sure that my right hon. Friend is pleased that we are providing more choice.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I thank the Minister for her statement. I do, however, fear that the Government are being too reliant on their plan A and not sufficiently heeding the warnings from the health community over the pressures faced or the urgency to act. However, we rehearsed those arguments earlier. On the issue of getting the unvaccinated vaccinated, the Government have my full support. It is incumbent on every one of us, as MPs, to show leadership in encouraging our constituents to take up their vaccinations.

Scotland leads the UK both in first and second dose vaccination rates, with 90% of those aged 12 and over vaccinated with at least one dose, while England sits at 85%. For second doses, this amounts to 81% versus 79%, with booster roll-outs now taking place across these lands as we speak. How do the UK Government plan to match Scotland and encourage greater uptake of vaccinations among those who are so far unvaccinated? Vaccinations among 12 to 15-year-olds are 3:1 times higher in Scotland than in England, with more than 46.5% of eligible Scottish students having got the vaccination compared with just some 15% of eligible English students. English headteachers have called for the Government to follow the lead of the Scottish Government and have drop-in vaccination centres at GP clinics, pharmacies and community centres. Will the Minister listen to English headteachers and seek to follow the Scottish Government's lead with vaccination drop-in centres?

Maggie Throup: I would like to reiterate the data I gave earlier that across the UK 86% of people have taken up the opportunity of a first dose and 78.9% their second dose. That is a really great achievement. To me, it is inappropriate to try to draw divisions between our Union; we need to work together on this. As I mentioned to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), we are opening up more opportunities for 12 to 15-year-olds to take their vaccines, and that is only right. However, we have to be really aware of safeguarding issues when it comes to 12 to 15-year olds getting their jabs and the importance of having their parents with them at that time.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement and all the work that she and her Department are doing. During recess I visited one of my local secondary schools, Swanmore College, where people are anxiously waiting for the vaccinations to come to the school. How can we speed up vaccinations in schools so that they can continue with their education?

Maggie Throup: The school age immunisation service has done a good job in getting through lots and lots of students in different schools. My hon. Friend asks

about how we can speed it up, and that is why we are providing opportunities for parents to take their children to the vaccination centres by booking through the national booking service, which will provide further choice over the coming days, weeks and months.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I think it is very unfair of the Health Secretary to put the Minister in the position of having to deliver this statement on his behalf, but we are where we are. Given that the British Medical Association, the NHS Confederation and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges have all expressed concern about where we are, can she give an update on the Health Secretary's response to me on Tuesday, which was woeful, regarding what we are going to do about public health, given that the public health budget is 24% lower than in 2015 and given the demands that will be placed on public health, for example in outbreak areas, such as Suffolk? If she can provide me with an update, I would be very grateful.

Maggie Throup: I reassure the hon. Lady that we look regularly at all the data, particularly the covid data. If we feel it is necessary, we put enhanced measures in place. A number of colleagues in the House will have experienced that. It works really well. Obviously, we have the Budget and the spending review coming up shortly, and I am sure she eagerly awaits what will be in them.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): On the devolution point, let us remember it is a two-way street. There may well be things that we can learn from the Scottish Government that they have done better and differently from the United Kingdom Government, and we should not be shy about that, but we should also point out that Scotland would not have had many vaccines had they not been part of the United Kingdom.

I just point out to my hon. Friend—I hope she will take this back to the Department—that it is dead easy to get the public engaged on this subject: the Prime Minister holds a press conference with the chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser and starts to explain in harsh terms what will happen if people do not carry on being vaccinated. That is the way to communicate, and we should do that. Can she also explain why we have given the booster vaccine to the GPs? They have enough to do. My integrated care system area is taking it away from the GPs and reopening the vaccine centres so that the GPs can get on with treating their patients, because there are not enough of them to do that job as it is. The pharmacies and the vaccine centres will take over the booster jabs.

Maggie Throup: I reassure my hon. Friend that there are numerous ways in which people can get a jab; it is not just at general practices.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I have been part of the Bristol health and care system for some two decades, and I have never quite seen it like this, and neither has anyone else. I want to ask the Minister about the secret criteria for plan B. We have over 90% occupancy, waiting times at record levels, waiting lists at record levels, appointments with GPs are difficult, ambulance back-up at record levels, social care discharge at problematically high levels and social care vacancies. What measure does the Government think we need,

other than more deaths and more infections? Will she be talking, perhaps with the committees of Back-Bench Conservative MPs, to decide which measure they think is sufficient to allow us to move to plan B, because it is a complete mystery to the rest of us?

Maggie Throup: The Government have clearly laid out our autumn and winter plan, and that is what we are sticking with.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her statement today and her confirmation of the Government's plans. I particularly welcome the £162.5 million for social care. Can she confirm that that will also have a package for discharge, as well as extra staff, because that will then allow the NHS to concentrate on fighting the backlog and this disease, rather than having the beds blocked?

Maggie Throup: There will be further details of this additional funding shortly, but it will be to encourage more people to become care workers and to support those in place already, so I am sure it will achieve exactly what my hon. Friend has requested.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Many of my constituents are desperate to get their third jabs and their boosters. The Minister said that if their invitation has not arrived, they can book on the national booking service or 119, but that is simply not working. When they get on to the national booking service, it says they are not eligible if they have not received an invitation letter. If they call 119, it is telling them it cannot override the system. Will the Minister please urgently look into that and fix the system, so that my constituents and many others can get those jabs, because they want them now?

Maggie Throup: Yes, I will definitely look into that. If there is a problem in the system, we will get it fixed.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her statement and for highlighting just how many people have been vaccinated in this country. Vaccine take-up has been very high in Harrogate and Knaresborough, reflecting that. I visited a large secondary school recently, and the headteacher told me that 250 pupils and 19 staff were off. It was emphasised that by no means was all of that a covid issue, but it was impacting on the operational capacity of the school and children's education. What additional incentives are being utilised to encourage vaccine take-up, particularly among younger people?

Maggie Throup: As I have said previously, we are opening up opportunities for children to get their vaccine, but I reassure the House that the school age immunisation service will not pay just one visit to schools; it will go back, because it realises it does not capture everyone the first time round.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): In her statement, the Minister twice used the phrase "prompt and proportionate". It does not feel like the Government are acting very promptly, and there are surely proportionate measures that we can take now—we do not have to wait for the whole of plan B to be implemented. What would be disproportionate about making mask wearing compulsory in enclosed private spaces now?

Maggie Throup: As I said earlier, we are still on plan A, and there is still more we can do with plan A. There is guidance about wearing face coverings. I ask everybody to look at that guidance and make their own decisions and their personal choice.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): Our vaccination programme has been fantastic, and I put on record my thanks to everybody in Hyndburn and Haslingden involved in that. Can the Minister tell the House what is in place to alleviate people's concerns, such as things they have seen on social media or other platforms?

Maggie Throup: There is absolutely no place for some of the disinformation on social media, and I request that that is looked at by the companies. A lot is taken down straightaway, but more can be done, because the message is that vaccines save lives.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The Minister will know that today the UN declared that we are on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure, and it singled out the UK as one of those taking a "me first" approach, on which it states:

"Ultimately, these actions will only prolong the pandemic, the restrictions needed to contain it, and human and economic suffering."

The Health Secretary risked undermining confidence in the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency when he incorrectly told the House that Valneva and Livingston's covid-19 vaccine would not get approval from the MHRA. Thankfully, he corrected the record, but it led his former vaccine taskforce chair to call on him to resign with the publication of positive phase 3 data from Valneva. Will the Minister welcome this news and apologise for the uncertainty and distress that her colleague caused? If approved, the Valneva vaccine should be ideal for transportation in all countries. There is still an opportunity for her Government to step up and stop the pandemic running out of control.

Maggie Throup: We have a mature vaccines programme with a lot of supply. The MHRA is globally recognised as a good regulator. We need to take reference from that and from what we are doing elsewhere with other vaccine companies.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for seeing me on Monday to discuss my Covid-19 Vaccine Damage Bill. I thank her for telling me that responsibility for vaccine damage is being transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to her Department with effect from 1 November and that there will be an eightfold increase in the staff dealing with those claims for vaccine damage payments, which shows that the Government are taking this issue seriously. Does she also accept that one way of reducing the number of 4.7 million people who have not had a vaccine is to increase vaccine confidence—this is what has happened in other jurisdictions, such as Australia—by ensuring that vaccine damage payments are available on a no-fault liability basis?

Maggie Throup: As my hon. Friend said, we had constructive discussions on Monday. I am taking the issue seriously and looking into it further.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I declare that I have diabetes. One in three people who have died from covid had diabetes, yet it has been unclear to those with diabetes whether they are eligible for a third vaccine. Can the Minister clarify whether all groups, including group 6, will be offered a booster? Will that be urgently communicated to people suffering from diabetes?

Maggie Throup: The booster has been offered to all those in cohorts 1 to 9, so cohort 6 is included in that.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): People in Wantage and Didcot, and across Oxfordshire, have been doing a great job of administering the vaccine to 12 to 15-year-olds, as they did for the older age groups, but unfortunately a small minority of people have been giving them abuse for that. Will my hon. Friend join me in saying that that is completely unacceptable and in thanking them for doing what is a vital task to keep us all safer?

Maggie Throup: I completely agree; there is no room for intimidation. I thank everybody who has taken part in delivering the amazing vaccine programme.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Minister says that 79% of people in the UK are fully vaccinated and boosters are being rolled out, yet this terrible virus is taking a desperately heavy toll on human lives, so can she imagine what it is like in most low-income countries where just 1% or 2% of people have been vaccinated? Can she tell us why the UK continues to be one of only a handful of countries blocking the demand for a waiver on the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights—TRIPS—agreement? Why has the UK so far delivered less than 10% of the doses it promised to poorer countries? That is an obscene moral failure, and also harms us here at home.

Maggie Throup: The UK is a global leader in delivering covid vaccines to the most vulnerable countries around the world, including through the Prime Minister's pledge to donate 100 million vaccine doses overseas by June next year. As of the middle of September, we had donated 10.3 million doses. Some 4.1 million were donated bilaterally to 16 countries and 6.2 million were distributed via COVAX.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): My GP has been excellent at promoting vaccinations. I had my second vaccination on 17 April. Five weeks ago, I got covid and I was pretty poorly, but thank God I had had the vaccinations. Last week, the GP chased me up to get my booster injection, which I had on 15 October, followed by the flu vaccination the next day. Other people who would like to have the booster have not yet got to the six-month limit. Does the Minister have a view about reducing that limit so that more people could get vaccinated more quickly?

Maggie Throup: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The data shows that although there is a drop-off in immunity, it does not drop off a cliff, so people who had their second vaccine five months ago still have plenty of immunity. I am delighted that he got his booster and his flu jab, and I encourage everyone else to get theirs too.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Can we have particular strategies for areas in our communities that have very low uptake? We need to counter the mythology and misinformation that have a disproportionate detrimental impact on those low-uptake communities. Such communities tend to be poorer and more impoverished with multiple levels of need and deprivation. We need particular strategies for those areas otherwise covid, which is already at a high level, will let rip.

We also need particular strategies for getting our secondary school pupils vaccinated. In secondary schools in Gateshead, even among those who indicated that they wanted a vaccine, only about a third of people in those age groups have so far been able to get one. Can we do something about the misinformation on the 119 helpline too, which is actually preventing constituents from getting accurate information about what they need to do to help themselves and their families?

Maggie Throup: I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman about hard-to-reach groups, which are in some of the most deprived and vulnerable parts. We have done a lot of work with community leaders to identify how we can get to those groups because, as he rightly says, it is important to achieve that. With regards to teenagers, we need to tackle disinformation. It is completely wrong that people feel intimidated. We also need to get the right messaging out. As I said, we are looking at opportunities for vaccinations other than through the school network.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Mask wearing has been shown to reduce the spread of covid in confined spaces. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care said that MPs should "set an example" over mask wearing. The Minister this morning said that MPs should make their own decisions about mask wearing, which flies in the face of the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

The confusion over mask wearing is reminiscent of the unfortunate great confusion about mask wearing in June 2020, which the Minister will no doubt recall. What will she do to encourage her colleagues on the Government Benches to set that good example in the House of Commons by wearing a mask?

Maggie Throup: As I have mentioned on numerous occasions, we are in plan A. There is guidance for wearing face coverings as part of that plan.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am sorry, but this is just not good enough. In my constituency, hundreds of children are off school, hundreds of people are not in work today, and, sadly, people are dying. As a result of that, rather than have a politically led strategy, will the Minister meet with the Association of Directors of Public Health to ensure that they take a lead on how we will manage the crisis in the coming months?

Maggie Throup: We are in a pandemic. The hon. Lady says that children are getting infections, which is why we have opened up the opportunity for 12 to 15-year-olds, as well as those 16 and above, to get their vaccine. That is important. They are protecting themselves and protecting other people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Government's vaccine roll-out has been a success story, but it is important that we continue that success story. I had the flu jab three weeks ago and I will have my covid booster in about four weeks. All sorts of constituents have contacted me to ask why they have been called for a third primary dose of the vaccine along with their flu jab. Are the Government considering a wider publicity campaign to clarify the reason behind the third jab, the criteria for the booster and the need for the flu jab as well at the same time?

Maggie Throup: A communications programme has been rolled out this week to encourage people to get their booster and their flu jab, and to get whichever comes first and then the other as soon as it is available.

Backbench Business

COP26: Limiting Global Temperature Rises

[Relevant Documents: Third Report of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, Session 2019–21, Net zero and UN climate summits: Scrutiny of Preparations for COP26 – interim report, HC 1265, and the Government response, HC 120. Oral evidence taken by the Environmental Audit Committee on 11 March 2021 on Preparation for COP26, HC 222, Session 2019–21. Oral evidence taken by the Scottish Affairs Committee on 25 March 2021 on COP26: delivering a successful COP26 in Glasgow, HC 1323, Session 2019–21. Oral evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 18 May 2021 on Environmental diplomacy, HC 196. Oral evidence taken by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee on 27 April 2021 and 23 June 2021 on The role of business, the public and civil society in COP26, HC 144, Session 2019–21 and HC 107. Oral evidence taken by the Treasury Committee on 5 July 2021 on Committee on COP26: climate change and finance, HC 519.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As people can already see, many Members want to participate in the debate. My advice is for Members to make short contributions so that we can get everybody in not just to this debate but to the following one.

1.19 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

“That this House has considered COP26 and limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius.”

It is a pleasure to open the debate on COP26 and limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. I would like to thank the Backbench Business Committee for recognising the pressing need for this debate and all Members who have offered their support.

The 2015 Paris agreement commits parties to:

“Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C”.

The difference that just half a degree can make has been underscored by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's special report on 1.5°C. It could mean many millions more people being subjected to life-threatening climate events from unprecedented crop failures and food insecurity to risks from diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, extreme heat and sea level rises. Staying below 1.5°C is essential for all of us, yet the IPCC's most recent report warned that unless there are “immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach.”

Globally, far from being on track for the 45% emission reduction by 2030 that scientists say is essential, we are on course for an emissions rise of 16%.

That is the context in which the UK is hosting COP26 in Glasgow. That is why the coming decade has been called the most consequential decade in human history, and it is why, as COP26 president and as the nation that led the industrial revolution, fuelled by coal

[Caroline Lucas]

and colonialism, the UK has a particular responsibility to lead the transition to a sustainable, just and resilient world in line with the science and with climate justice.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for opening the debate, and she knows I listen carefully to what she says. I really welcome the net zero strategy the Government announced this week. I think Ministers do deserve credit for being the first major economy to legislate for net zero, and we are decarbonising faster than any G7 country. I realise that for our opponents there is a temptation to pour scorn, express cynicism and say it will never be enough, but as somebody who is nationally recognised as being a thought leader in this space, which part of the Government's net zero strategy outlined this week would she like to praise and give credit to?

Caroline Lucas: I have no problem in praising the Government's targets. What I have problems with is looking at the fact that there is a dearth of actual actions to meet those targets. That is what we see again and again. The Climate Change Committee has itself said that there are no real plans to deliver the targets that are set. Frankly, the climate cares very little for targets. What it wants are the concrete policies to meet them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for everything she has done in bringing these issues to the House for our attention. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as host of this year's conference, must be vocal and committed in relation to our net zero emissions, and thereby pose as role models for others to follow. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Caroline Lucas: Absolutely. Leading by example is crucial: we have to walk the talk.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): No one questions the hon. Lady's commitment on these issues, but is it not a bit unfair to criticise the Government for a lack of concrete action when, for example, the proportion of electricity generated by coal has fallen, since 2013, from 40% to less than 2%? That is a real change. When it comes to looking forward, a number of new technologies are still necessary if we are going to avoid the climate tipping point. Does she agree that investment in science and technology is going to be a crucial part of the mix?

Caroline Lucas: The right hon. Member is absolutely right. The power sector is the one sector that is going faster than the others, and that is an area where we can have a greater amount of confidence. My colleague, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), did just whisper to me, "Thanks to the Lib Dems when they were in coalition Government". It is also of course to do with some of the big changes made some time ago under Margaret Thatcher—we would not necessarily say that they were done for the right reasons and in the right way, but they certainly did get emissions down—and I do pay tribute for that particular part of the equation.

On science and technology, yes, of course they are going to have a massive role to play, but so too is Government changing the policy framework within which decisions are made. The difference between some of us

on this side of the House and those on the right hon. Gentleman's side is that, all too often, it sounds as though Conservative Members are imagining we can continue with business as usual but, with some technology, just changing the technologies we are using to deliver that business as usual. What we recognise is that we need not just behaviour change, but systems change. We need to change the kind of economic system we have, which is a far bigger change than what we have been talking about so far.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: Let me just make a little bit of progress, and I promise that I will let others in.

The UK presidency has identified four goals for COP26. The first is to secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5°C within reach, but I want to say to the House that the climate does not actually care much about target dates. What matters is how much carbon has been emitted into the atmosphere and how much will be emitted over the rest of this century. The figures are quite stark, so I hope that the House will indulge me while I go through them.

Based on the IPCC's calculations, the global remaining carbon budget—the total we can afford to burn between now and the time we reach net zero if we want to give ourselves a two thirds chance of staying within 1.5°C of warming—is just 320 billion tonnes from the start of next year. Given that we are currently burning through that at a rate of 40 billion tonnes a year, it does not take much to do the maths and to conclude that, by 2030, it will be gone if we do not rapidly rid ourselves of fossil fuels. That is the global picture.

To replay that in the domestic picture for our own carbon targets, if we divide the global budget equally on a per capita basis, but also allow for our disproportionate responsibility for the cumulative emissions in the atmosphere—after all, we were the leaders of the industrial revolution—it has been calculated that it would leave the UK a budget of just 2.4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide. That is a vanishingly small amount in the wider scheme of things when we adjust still further to allow for the carbon burned overseas in the service of UK consumption as well as our territorial emissions. Measured like that, our total carbon footprint is about 500 million tonnes a year. Again, I say to the House: do the maths. That gives us barely five years before our 2.4 billion tonne budget is gone. That is the reality. That is the inconvenient truth.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The hon. Member is making an excellent beginning to this great debate, and it is so good to see so many people speaking. What does she make of the cuts to international aid, which have made the problem for the future outlook even worse?

Caroline Lucas: I will certainly be coming to that shortly, because I cannot think of a more damaging thing to have done a matter of months, as it was, before the COP26—a big global summit at which we need to have the trust of the developing countries. I think the idea that one of the richest countries in the world would just slash our aid budget is absolutely unforgivable, and we cannot be surprised that some of the poorest countries do not have confidence in us.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): The hon. Member is making some excellent points in her speech. On the point about developing nations, it is the most vulnerable who pay the price, and international climate finance is based on debt, which is locking these countries into more debt. Would she not agree that now is the time to look at grants to help these developing nations and communities get out of that?

Caroline Lucas: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. It is quite shocking for people to realise that so much of our climate finance is actually in the form of loans, not grants. Given that we are talking about some of the most vulnerable countries in the world, which are already trying to cope with the impacts of climate change, for which they were entirely not responsible, I think the idea that we are then going to ask them for interest on those debts is absolutely obscene.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I was very proud to support this debate, and I am delighted that the hon. Member has secured it. Is that not why the concept of climate justice is so important? We should recognise the historical obligation we have in this part of the world for having contributed to climate change to those who have done the least to cause it and who are being hit first and hardest. That is a concept the Scottish Parliament has recognised and is trying to live up to, and it is a standard that we still have not heard the UK Government accept. Would it not be helpful if, at the end of this debate, the Minister said that the UK Government accepted the need to achieve climate justice?

Caroline Lucas: I could not thank the hon. Member more for his intervention. I think he has been reading my notes, because I was going to make exactly that point. The Prime Minister himself has said:

“It is the biggest economies in the world that are causing the problem, while the smallest suffer the worst consequences.”

Yet he has not grasped the implications of his own statement. As the hon. Member has just said, climate justice means the biggest economies doing far more and being far more ambitious than net zero in 30 years’ time. Climate justice means cutting emissions at home, without overreliance on international offsets or costly and uncertain negative emissions technologies. Climate justice also means recognising the obscenity of continuing with business as usual knowing that young people, especially those in climate-vulnerable countries, are paying for it literally with their futures.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the hon. Lady for her excellent speech. Following that point, at COP26 do we need to get proper funding for technology transfer to the poorest countries in the world, which need such technology to protect their environments? Unfortunately, the signs following covid, where there has not been a proper sharing of vaccines or vaccine knowledge, are not good. We have to internationalise our knowledge freely across the whole world in order to protect the environment on which we all rely.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, with which I wholeheartedly agree. I particularly agree that if we look at the covid pandemic as an example of international co-operation, it does not augur well. If we cannot properly share technology and

vaccines even when our own wellbeing depends so directly on that, it does not augur well for the climate crisis. We absolutely need the kind of technology transfer to which he refers.

Let me say a few words about the Government’s own track record, because we are not on track to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, let alone the sixth carbon budget, which is the first to be based on net zero by 2050, rather than the older 80% reduction. Just last month, Green Alliance calculated that the Government policies announced since 2020 will cut emissions by just 24% by 2032, and that the policies out for consultation, even if enacted, would still fall far short of the fifth carbon budget. This week’s publications of the net zero strategy and the heat and building strategy lack ambition. They lack urgency and—crucially—they lack the serious funding we need. As a result they still do not do enough to get us back on track. Time is running out in the race for our future, and the Government are barely over the starting line.

Not only are the Government not doing enough of the right things, but they are actively doing too many wrong things. Consider some of the most egregious examples on the charge sheet: a £27 billion road building scheme; the expansion of airports; scrapping the green homes grant just six months after it was introduced; stripping climate change clauses out of trade deals; and an obligation still in statute to maximise the economic recovery of UK petroleum. Perhaps most egregious of all, we are pressing ahead with Cambo, a new oilfield off Shetland. No wonder the Climate Change Committee has concluded that the Government continue to “blunder into high carbon choices”.

Leading by example on climate and nature matters, not just here at home, but because globally the first rule of diplomacy is to walk your talk. Perhaps it is not surprising that, despite what I am sure have been the best efforts of the COP26 President-designate, the Government have so far failed to persuade many other countries to come forward with climate targets aligned to 1.5°C. Indeed, Gambia is currently the only country whose climate pledge is compatible with 1.5°C. Based on the UN’s assessment of the nationally determined contributions submitted so far, the world is on track for warming of around 2.7°C. That cannot be allowed to happen. Shamefully, almost 90 countries responsible for more than 40% of global emissions, including China and India, failed to meet the UN deadline at the end of July to submit new pledges ahead of the Glasgow meeting. What more will the Government do to galvanise more ambitious action to keep 1.5°C alive? What is the President’s plan post-COP26 if the world’s collective pledges are not compatible with 1.5°C?

The Government’s second goal for COP26 is to adapt to protect communities and natural habitats. Globally, Ministers need to lead efforts for a new post-2025 public finance goal, specifically for adaptation, and ensure that other countries and the multilateral development banks follow the UK’s commitment to ringfence 50% of climate finance for adaptation. We need a scaling up of locally led adaptation and support that is accessible and responsive to the needs of marginalised groups. We also need ambitious and rigorous ecosystem protection and restoration incorporated into the enhanced nationally determined contributions and adaptation plans of all countries. Nature, with its vast ability to store carbon

[Caroline Lucas]

and cushion us from shocks such as flooding, is our biggest ally in the fight against climate breakdown. It is therefore shocking that just weeks before the start of COP26, more than 100 fires have been reported on England's peatlands. They are a vital carbon store, and it is environmental vandalism to set fire to them right now. The climate and nature emergencies are two sides of the same coin, and they need to be addressed together with far greater co-ordination.

Let me move to the third goal of mobilising finance. The COP26 President has stated that delivering the 10-year finance pledge is a matter of trust. Yes it is, but when that pledge has not been delivered anything like in full, trust is at breaking point. Any leverage that the UK might have had in persuading others to step up has been carelessly thrown away by its becoming the only G7 country to cut overseas aid in the midst of a pandemic. That unforgiveable decision means that climate programmes are being slashed, leaving some of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries bearing the brunt. For example, aid to Bangladesh has been cut by more than £100 million. It is not too late to change direction, restore the official development assistance budget, ensure that climate finance is genuinely new and additional, and increase our commitment so that we are providing our fair share.

We must also act on loss and damage—a subject far too long consigned to the margins of negotiations. I welcome the UK presidency's more constructive approach to that issue, including making progress on operationalising the so-called Santiago Network, but we need to do more. We must facilitate a process to scale up dedicated finance specifically for loss and damage, and we must acknowledge that as the third pillar of climate action, on a par with mitigation and adaptation. We must ensure that it has its own dedicated space on every COP agenda, and take forward calls for a specific loss and damage champion. It is long past time for the more wealthy countries to put aside their concerns about liability and compensation, and instead to come from a place of solidarity and human rights, in order to make meaningful progress on loss and damage and delivering new finance. As the young Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate has said:

“Our leaders are lost and our planet is damaged... You cannot adapt to lost cultures, you cannot adapt to lost traditions, you cannot adapt to lost history, you cannot adapt to starvation. You cannot adapt to extinction.”

The climate crisis is pushing many communities beyond their ability to adapt.

The fourth goal of the COP26 presidency is to work together to deliver. No one would argue with that, but I go back to the context in which these talks are being held. The summit is taking place while the pandemic continues to rage in many of the poorest countries, as a direct result of vaccine apartheid. Only around 2% of the populations of low-income countries have received even one dose of the vaccine, and of the 554 million doses promised by the richest nations, just 16% have so far reached their destination. That failure is morally obscene, as well as running entirely counter to our own self-interest. If COP26 is to succeed, the concerns and justified anger of countries in the global south urgently need to be addressed. That means providing enough

finance and vaccines to match the need, waiving intellectual property rights, and transferring technical capacity and expertise.

Glasgow is not only crucial for delivering climate ambition and finance in line with the Paris agreement; it is also a litmus test for safer, fairer, more inclusive forms of economic restructuring and global governance. It is a chance urgently to shift to an economic system that values the long-term wellbeing of people and planet above the endless growth that, in the words of the OECD, has generated “significant harms” over recent decades. When the climate crisis is caused by our extractive, exploitative economic model, we cannot expect to win the chance for a better future by re-running a race that we see we will ultimately lose, and that everyone else will lose as well.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene before she winds up her speech, and I am pleased that she secured the support of the Backbench Business Committee to hold this important debate ahead of COP26, which starts in under two weeks. She has spoken powerfully, and in the light of what she has said, does she agree that the UK is showing leadership in, for example, including international aviation and maritime emissions in our sixth carbon budget—we are the first and, so far, only country prepared to do that? She has called on this country to do that for some time, so will she at least welcome it?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee for his intervention. I welcome the fact that aviation and shipping will be brought into our climate budgets but, as always, the devil will be in the detail. I have great concern that some will try to find ways of assuming that technology can get us out of this hole as well. I suggest that it cannot, and that we need proposals such as those made by the citizens Climate Assembly on a frequent flier levy. I think we need to change behaviour, rather than think that technology will get us out of the hole, but I look forward to seeing the Government's plans. [Interruption.] I am winding up, Madam Deputy Speaker—I have less than four minutes. You will be pleased to know I have a page to go, and I am rattling through it.

To conclude, if the UK Government are to rise to the challenge of being president of the most important global summit in a generation, and if we are to keep 1.5° alive, we need a justice reset to be at the heart of all four of the Government's objectives. Will the Minister therefore say what more will be done to ensure that countries such as China, Russia and Brazil step up, and to demonstrate more ambitious leadership at home? Will she urge her colleagues in the Government to reverse the aid cut and step up with new funds for loss and damage, and will she propose a revision to our own domestic emissions reduction target based on that new understanding of what constitutes our fair share of the global climate budget?

I am championing in Parliament the new climate and ecological emergency Bill, which sets out a legal framework to do just that. It is backed by more than 115 MPs and many councils, businesses and organisations, and I commend it to the Minister. This is our last chance—our best chance. The young people who are striking for the climate and for a safer world know that. The workers who are demanding a just transition know that. The

businesses that are, frankly, far outstripping Governments when it comes to climate targets and actions know that. It is time for the Government to recognise that we can all win, and that to successfully rise to the challenges facing us all—to seize this chance—is perfectly possible with the political will. If we do not do it, we will never be forgiven by history.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I realise that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) took a number of interventions, but I just remind her that we try to get as many others in as possible, and the guidance for opening speeches is a maximum of 15 minutes. I am afraid that I am going to have to impose a time limit straightaway, which will be four minutes.

1.41 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is an honour to be called so early in this most important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on obtaining it at such a timely moment, and on speaking with her characteristic enthusiasm and charm, if I may say so, while not relenting on the urgency of the problem and the challenge that we face.

I will be attending the COP as Chairman of the Liaison Committee with a number of other Select Committee Chairs, and we will be concentrating very much on how we scrutinise the Government's performance to deliver the COP goals. I think that this House sometimes gets a little negative, by finding fault with what the Government have or have not done. We should ask creatively and think positively about what the Government are going to do in the future and hold them accountable for that. [*Interruption.*] That is not a criticism of the Opposition. I have been in opposition as well; I know what it is like. This is too important. That is what we are going to do. We want the Government to define the metrics by which they will measure the performance of their own Departments.

I do not agree with all the hon. Lady's figures, but if hon. Members watch the video that I produced just before the conference—if people google “Bernard Jenkin COP debate YouTube”, they will find the 11-minute video that I launched about climate change—they will see that she almost understates the perilous future that humanity faces on the present projections. The IPCC's midpoint projections show that we are planning, as a race, to put more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere between now and the end of this century than in the whole of human history so far. That is completely unacceptable, but that is the current trend. We have to change that.

We have to change the population projections. We cannot have over 11 billion people on the face of this planet by the end of this century; we will destroy the opportunity of our children and our grandchildren to survive. We cannot continue the massive decimation of species in our oceans and on our lands among the five living kingdoms of species on this planet. We are seeing an acceleration of species decline as we speak. And we cannot continue the wanton despoliation of our planet—the rape of our seas, the plundering of natural resources, the destruction of carbon-absorbing habitats—which is also still accelerating, despite all that we are doing.

In order for us to address that, this country must demonstrate that we can do and lead better than anyone else. I am the first to admire how the Prime Minister has put the environment at the top of the Government's agenda, set targets and put this issue at the heart of the national debate, but we must still do much better. The machinery of government is simply not up to this. The Cabinet Committee system and the Cabinet Office are not thinking strategically enough about these huge challenges to deliver what is necessary. I have long complained, in this House and in my work as a Select Committee Chair, about the lack of strategic capacity at the heart of Government. That is what we must now address, and that is what I will be addressing.

1.45 pm

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) in probably the most important debate that we could hold on any topic, notwithstanding what we have been discussing earlier today and all the other important issues that we have to face up to.

I agree with the analysis of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), so I will not repeat it; I will get straight to the heart of what must we do rather than discussing what the problems are. Even a former sceptic, as I believe the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex is—clearly, he is not a sceptic now—has cottoned on that the question is what we do now and what issues we should be addressing.

I freely acknowledge that there are strengths in the Government's approach, but there are also weaknesses, so I will use my time to focus on a few of those. While I am getting myself into trouble, however, may I welcome the former Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn)? He has been a constant campaigner on these issues and has led the way for the rest of us.

The weaknesses on the Government's side include the question of home insulation. I am proud to have been one of the lead sponsors of the Labour party's Opposition day motion in 2019 declaring a national climate and environment emergency, which made our country the first in the world to do so. I want a green recovery and a green industrial strategy. I want it for the north-east of England, just as I am sure, Dame Rosie, you want it for Yorkshire. There are jobs in this; there is a positive contribution that we can make.

I wish to draw attention to the position of our great oceans in all this. I do not think the effect that we are having on the sea gets the attention it deserves. The oceans act as a natural climate moderator, mediating temperature, driving the weather and determining rainfall, droughts and floods. Crucially, they are also effective in absorbing heat and carbon dioxide.

Catherine West: My right hon. Friend mentioned his own track record in relation to the amount of work that needs to be done. Is he aware of the enormous amount of people who need to be trained even to install heat pumps, which is the Government's current proposal? The umbrella body says that we need thousands more workers to be trained for that. What assessment has he made of the challenge to the workforce and the people who will install all this new technology?

Mr Brown: I think my hon. Friend is on to a very good point. I am struck by the limited number of heat pumps that are proposed, given what was earlier presented. Moreover, there is some scepticism as to whether they work to deliver the sort of output that people currently get from their gas boilers. I am also worried about how my constituents will pay for them. Although there is a subsidy of £5,000, the remaining sum is still a large amount of money for a working-class family to find. Even on the assumption that the boilers work, not everyone lives in a home that is suitable to have them installed—we think of the obvious example of flats and so on. I am not saying we should not explore all these technologies, but we need to be aware of the limitations.

The Government have wrapped their package up as one big package that will deliver results. They are, frankly, being optimistic, so we need to be sceptical. However, we also need to keep an open mind on issues such as smaller nuclear reactors that the Government, rightly, have put money behind and are exploring. It is very early days for what would be a relatively new industry for us if it were not for the defence sector. There probably is a positive role to play here, so that is an aspect of the Government's policy that I would welcome.

Anna McMorrin: My right hon. Friend is making some very good points. There are reports today that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Japan and Australia are trying to change a report on phasing out fossil fuels. Is it not for the UK Government to make sure that all countries are working together to meet targets and reach the 1.5°C limit?

Mr Brown: I was very disappointed to hear those reports on the broadcast news this morning. Being a Newcastle MP, I have to be cautious as to what I say about Saudi Arabia, for reasons I am sure my hon. Friend appreciates. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) says, "Don't hold back." I have probably got myself into more than enough trouble today, without flirting with yet more of it.

The time for our country to make a clear stand and to show clear leadership is now. It is our opportunity to build on the Paris agreement. I hope we do so and I wish the Government well in their endeavours. I want to give as much positive support to the Government's efforts as I can. Are they doing enough? Probably not. We need to do more.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am now going to reduce the time limit to three minutes. I have been able to warn the next speaker that I was going to do so.

1.52 pm

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is an honour to be called in this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing it. I am conscious of the time, so I would like to make my remarks first of all on what is happening locally in my constituency and in the county, and then talk a little bit about leadership, which has been referred to already.

I pay tribute to everyone in Hertford and Stortford—individual residents and groups—who is working every day to highlight this issue and to take practical steps. A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending a series of events by the Hertford and Our Changing Climate group of local residents, who are very, very focused on the practical steps we can all take to make a difference. They talked about where we can put our cash, what investments we can use, what cars we can drive, what changes we can make to our own homes, and to our transport and habits—very practical behavioural change. I applaud them for that initiative.

Steve Brine: I am so glad that my hon. Friend is opening her speech by talking about local action, on top of the international change that the Government can instigate. Winchester Area SuperHomes, which is really pressing the retrofit issue, is a great example in my constituency of local action. I used to think it was all about recreating the green deal or the green homes grant. That is important from a national perspective to help our communities, but actually a lot of the answer can be found in our local organisations and I am so pleased she is mentioning them.

Julie Marson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, because it is really important that we encourage and recognise the work our constituents, individually and in groups, are doing.

I would also like to mention the Bishop's Stortford Climate Group, who hold my feet to the fire and all our feet to the fire. They challenge because they care. Our constituents really care about this issue. They are holding events called "the gathering" in the next few weeks, including local authorities, individuals and other groups, to keep the momentum in the run-up to COP26, which is so important. I thank them for that. I thank the efforts of both my local authorities, at district level and county level. I will mention one particular project that I think has huge potential to change our lives in Hertfordshire, and that is the Hertfordshire-Essex rapid transit—HERT—project. Such local projects will scale up and make a difference to us all on a national basis.

I accept that there is lots happening, but there is lots to do. On the question of leadership, the Government and the country are taking a really important leadership role. Being the world leader in setting targets, such as the 2050 net zero target and interim targets within that, is a really important thing. I do not think we can overstate that. We have had the shorthand for some of the targets—coal, cars, cash and trees—which encompass some of the key areas on which we are taking a leadership role. I understand that with the nature of the task and the challenge before us it is very easy to say, "Nothing is enough." However, I do not think we can overstate the effort and the leadership this country and this Government are taking.

There are lots of aspects of leadership, but one of aspect was touched on earlier: investment in research and development and innovation. As has been mentioned, behavioural change is really important, but the technological change that will happen and will need to happen to address this challenge is happening. I believe it will happen even more quickly in the next few years. We can do it. We should all get behind the scientists, technicians and engineers who will deliver it for us, and I commend them.

1.57 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is good to speak after the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), because in many ways she embodies the best of those on the Conservative Benches on this issue.

I will congratulate the Government on some of the work they have done, and continue to do, on moving towards rectifying our climate crisis. However, the analogy I would use it this: imagine we are all sat in a car heading off a cliff edge. What we actually need is a big, hard handbrake turn to avert that cliff edge. What we have at the moment are a Government who are gently taking their foot off the accelerator. Quite simply, that is not good enough. We need a big shove on the brakes: a big handbrake turn and a big skid to turn away from there. That is not happening. I am happy that they are taking their foot off the accelerator, but frankly, for where we are at the moment, that is simply not good enough. The depressing fact is that we are still having these debates. We are still talking about keeping the temperature down to 1.5° C, even though we know this is an existential threat. We are fiddling not just while Rome burns, but while the planet burns. For those of us who have known about this for 30 years or more, that is frankly ridiculous and future generations will never forgive us.

The 2021 IPCC report was a code red for humanity, but alas a green light for business as usual for this Government. As I said earlier this week, there are two problems with the Government's net zero strategy: net and zero. Zero, because we know, as those who were quick enough to get on the internet and see what documents the Government had put up will have seen, that aviation emissions will be increasing well beyond 2035. We will be pumping out millions of tonnes into the atmosphere well beyond 2035 and beyond 2050. And net, because the negative emission technology we are relying on to suck the carbon out of the atmosphere does not exist at scale yet and shows no signs of doing so.

Let us be honest: I believe the net zero strategy is classic greenwash, big on soundbites, small on detail and absolutely limited on systemic change—the kind of systemic change that we need if we are to avert a climate crisis.

2 pm

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Despite the UK being the only G20 member that is on target to achieve its commitments to keep global temperatures from rising by more than 1.5°C, according to the annual Climate Transparency report, we are consistently being slammed by climate activists for not doing more. I therefore suggest that Extinction Rebellion activists sail to one of the other G20 member countries next time they wish to glue themselves to roads and trains, which disrupts the lives of everyday British people.

The report also says that the UK has lower per capita emissions output than the G20 average. Why is it that the UK consistently goes above and beyond in its commitments to reach net zero while almost every other nation falls below their fair share of climate action? We must therefore openly debate the realities of paying to reach net zero. The Government's Climate Change Committee estimated that, to reach the 2050 target of net zero, the UK's low-carbon investment would need

to increase fivefold to around £50 billion a year by 2030. Other estimations have been significantly higher. However, the true cost, of course, is simply unknown.

The Treasury has not ruled out further tax rises to pay for the green revolution either, and how can it? At first glance, electric cars may be cheaper to run than traditional internal combustion engines but the cost to the Exchequer will be significant, because only 5% of VAT is charged on domestic electricity, which is used to charge electric cars at home, while the Chancellor received £37 billion in fuel duty and vehicle excise duty revenues in the last financial year. Losing that would create a tax vacuum equivalent to 1.5% of GDP, which will only come, invariably, through higher taxation. It is highly unlikely that that will be levied on green technology, so it will be the people left behind who cannot afford expensive electric cars and live in places that do not have the infrastructure who will undoubtedly shoulder the extra tax burden.

The same may also be said regarding the recent announcement that hundreds of millions will be spent to persuade people to get rid of gas boilers and purchase expensive heat pumps. Even with a £5,000 grant, that is still out of reach for the vast majority of working people, and those who can afford them will be forced to rely on expensive alternative heating arrangements because heat pumps provide only background heat. Bills will inevitably rise again for those unable to switch as they fund grants given to those who can.

My constituents in Blackpool will not thank the Government if they are faced with rising fuel bills, increased taxes and energy shortages, all in the name of being the world leader in achieving net zero, while much of the world stands by and watches.

2.3 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I would like to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who quoted the IPCC's most recent report, which stated that

"unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to...1.5 °C...will be beyond reach."

Today, we live in a world with global warming of 1.1°C, yet it is a world already ravaged by forest fires and increasingly frequent extreme weather events. It is a world made poorer by rapid biodiversity loss and made more geopolitically unstable by profoundly changing climate patterns. Despite that, my generation may be living through the last days of relative climatic, environmental and ecological stability. It is this realisation that makes COP26 and its outcome so important.

Like others, I can see that the Government's net zero strategy published this week was an important but overdue intervention. Its ambitions for renewable electricity generation are laudable, the emphasis on decarbonising household heating welcome, and the desire to reduce the greenhouse footprint of our transport sector commendable. And yet, action falls short of the rhetoric, especially when addressing the costs of the transition for households. The heat pump strategy, for example, needs to go further. Indeed, it will benefit only about 0.3% of Welsh households. Instead, greater capital resourcing should be given to the Welsh Government, who are responsible for housing as a devolved competence, so that they can implement a whole-house approach, addressing both insulation and heating supply.

[Ben Lake]

That is just one example, but unfortunately, there are many more, which prompts the question: why? It seems that the answer lies in the Treasury and perhaps its hesitancy to accept the climate crisis for what it is: an existential crisis. It is short-sighted in the extreme for some to suggest that we cannot afford the transition. It is the cost of inaction that is unaffordable. The Treasury's "Net Zero Review" details that the number of natural catastrophes has risen markedly since the 1980s and Munich Re has calculated that global disasters exacerbated by climate change caused \$210 billion-worth of losses in 2020 alone. Meanwhile, the Climate Change Committee found the annual net cost over the next 30 years for the UK's transition to net zero to be £10 billion, or 0.5% of GDP.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to find positive ways to allow our constituents to be involved in making our cities and towns greener? For example, the new 110,000-tree Hempsted woods in my constituency will give every schoolchild the chance to plant at least one tree. That will be alongside the green energy from solar, wind and hydrogen that we hope to produce there. Does he agree that this is the sort of local initiative that goes alongside the national commitments?

Ben Lake: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I agree wholeheartedly. If we are to get to grips with the crisis, it will require both the national and local action that he described so eloquently.

The cost of inaction is unaffordable. Even if we were to disagree on that point, the alternative—a world aflame, flooded and barren—outweighs any short-term Treasury reservations about the cost of the green transition. To put it simply, we can and must do more. I urge the Government to support the COP26 President in the final weeks before the summit so that we achieve global successes on emissions commitments and ensure that the Chancellor's forthcoming Budget meets the biggest challenge of our age.

2.7 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): It gives me enormous pleasure to speak in this place before an event of such magnitude. The agenda and discussions at the COP26 summit in just a couple of weeks' time will be centred, quite rightly, around global vision, yet the outcomes that I believe we all want to see, and must enact, have to be at a local level across every city, town, village and community across our country.

I would like to draw the House's attention, not for the first time in this place, to what is going on in my constituency, which I and all my constituents are so passionate about. We want to ensure that we leave this planet in a much better state than we found it for the next generation. I think of the great work that has been done on cleaning up the River Wharfe in my constituency, protecting our precious green open spaces and lobbying hard against the Aire valley incinerator, which I have spoken about many a time in this place. We have been able to make great progress on these challenges, which I face locally, but there are also many great initiatives that are happening. I pay credit to Climate Action Ilkley and businesses such as Airedale Springs, which has already

taken great measures, putting solar panels on the business's buildings so that they can provide green energy to support what it is doing.

The spirit of my constituents is exactly the attitude that I will take when I go to COP next month to speak on the benefits of regenerative agriculture and improving soil health and water quality through such farming techniques. We have already seen the great work being done in this place domestically, and it was a great pleasure to support the Environment Bill yesterday as it moves through this place. When it is passed, it will ensure that we have cleaner rivers, better air quality and more woodland planting.

The Government have also given their 10-point plan an airing with respect to how we will get the green industrial revolution moving, but our work in the fight against climate change cannot be contained to these shores. That is why the Government must use the COP26 presidency to get other countries in line with our environmental objectives. They have already made great progress through the G7 summit in Cornwall earlier this year under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend is making some powerful points about what we need to do. On non-fossil fuel energy and domestic security and supply, does he agree that we should be doing lots more on nuclear, including with small modular reactors, and on marine energy, harnessing the power of tides and waves in our own country?

Robbie Moore: I completely agree. Small modular reactors definitely need to be explored and can definitely be a positive mechanism for our country to drive forward green, clean energy, which will help many of our communities. It comes back to the point that we want to have a positive impact across every city, every town, every village and every community that we represent.

As a result of the leadership shown by our Prime Minister at the G7, we have managed to get a commitment to limiting the global rise in temperature to 1.5°, achieving net zero and supporting developing countries to be greener. At COP26, the Government need to take a tougher stance on ensuring that other countries play their part in achieving those objectives, but not be complicit in doing so.

As a nation, we have shown that being more environmentally friendly need not come at a cost to national finances. In fact, over the past three decades, our economy has grown by 78%, while emissions have reduced by 44%. There is no excuse for other countries not to follow our lead. The United Kingdom should not be afraid to push the point.

2.11 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want you to imagine the world in 2050. If our emissions plateau and we do not reduce them any further, our lives will feel very different. In many places in the world, the air will be clogged with pollution. Respiratory problems will be more widespread. Coastal cities will continue to suffer ever more destructive flooding in which many people will die, either from the flooding itself or from waterborne diseases. Vast regions

will be affected by drought, some areas will even be deserts and 2 billion people in the hottest parts of the world will regularly experience temperatures of more than 60°C. There will also be a refugee crisis on an unimaginable scale as people are forced to leave their homes and seek safety in other places.

What I have described is the worst-case scenario spelled out by two of the architects of the Paris agreement. COP26 is our last chance to get our house in order so that we can reach net zero and limit the global temperature rise to 1°C. The IPCC's special report is clear that we need

“rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land...infrastructure ...and industrial systems”.

That means stopping investment in fossil fuels and it means a just transition to 100% renewable energy, instead of investing in 16 new North sea oil and gas projects. Frankly, it means the Government abandoning their ideology and obsession with the free market; putting mass investment on a post-war scale into millions of green jobs that are well-paid and unionised; and building the homes we need.

Will the Government support the green new deal Bill, which would transform our society's infrastructure at the scale and pace demanded by the science and fix our rigged economic model, which fails the majority of people as well as our planet? Will they support the climate and ecological emergency Bill, which would substantially strengthen our environmental commitments and force the UK to take responsibility for the carbon emissions that it generates, not only within our borders but abroad?

Those least responsible for bringing about the climate emergency will suffer its worst consequences while Governments allow transnational polluters to get away with impunity. Developed countries must make good on their promise to mobilise at least \$100 billion in climate finance per year; as other hon. Members have said, that must be in grants, not loans. We need international financial institutions to step up and work towards unleashing the trillions in private and public sector finance required to secure global net zero.

2.14 pm

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome).

I am going to change the tone of the debate, because in so much of it we have had a bit of negativity, whether that was from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas)—I congratulate her on securing the debate—who was almost saying that we should atone for the sins of our fathers when it comes to our carbon, or from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton), who thinks that it will cost us much more in taxes.

I disagree fundamentally with both outlooks. I very much believe that we can have a greener, better future and halt the decline. It is clearly an issue, but I do not believe that it is irreversible. Nor do I see our taxes rising: there will be many more green jobs and technologies in future to offset that and we will have a net gain in jobs and increase in wealth.

I see this as a more positive debate and the UK's role in it as a very positive one. After all, taking the presidency of COP26 really is a marker in the sand, not just for our

country, but for what we can achieve. COP26 presents a critical chance for countries to accelerate the transition to a cleaner, greener, more resilient global economy. We have heard many times in this debate why we need to do that for the environment, which is clearly correct, but we should also touch on how the population of this country want us to do it as well. Recent research from the WWF and Demos shows that the public are united in getting the UK to meet our climate goals, with 90% supporting the roll-out of electric vehicles and 77% wanting a more ambitious approach to low-carbon heating in homes.

I welcome the Government's moves on heat pumps this week. I hope that we also get involved with hydrogen for home heating, which is another solution. The Government are making great progress. The UK stands in a position of authority because its nationally determined contribution is an emissions reduction

“by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels”—

a significant increase on our previous target of 53%, and clearly in line with our 2050 target. Numerous Opposition speeches referred to NDCs; in fact, our NDC is far better than the EU's target of only a 55% reduction. We are a global leader, and we are showing how we can do this faster.

I acknowledge that I am nearly out of time, but I want to touch briefly on the finance sector, which has an incredibly important part in the role that the UK can play in getting to a low-carbon future. The UK is a global leader in finance, but we must also show how our companies need to play their part. We have heard a lot about how the UK and the world can do more, but businesses can also do a lot more.

It is therefore important that we use COP to make it mandatory for all large companies to disclose their net zero transition plans, which should be aligned with 1.5°, and to set out a clear timeframe for mandatory implementation. As the House knows, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on environmental, social, and governance, so the subject is close to my heart. We need to get companies and business on board and show them the business opportunities of low carbon and the role they can play in lowering our emissions.

2.17 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate.

The COP26 President has tweeted that

“to host a successful, inclusive #COP26 this November, both youth and civil society must be at the heart of both our preparations, and the summit itself”.

I agree that the climate emergency requires a democratic response, and our approach to the talks should reflect that. It is because we have not had enough democracy in our economy and in our society that we find ourselves debating the issue today. As long as only a few wealthy and powerful people make and lobby for decisions, those decisions will be taken in their interests, not the interests of everyone, and especially not those of the people most affected by the climate emergency.

Whether it gives people more power over our political institutions, over our communities or over our workplaces, more democracy is a precondition of averting climate catastrophe, but to people across the country, negotiations

[*Olivia Blake*]

at the summit will feel very remote. I know that while many people believe passionately in taking actions to address the climate crisis, they also feel powerless. There will almost certainly be a chasm separating those campaigning for climate justice on the streets of Glasgow and those inside the conference hall, which is starkly highlighted by reports today of Governments seeking to water down key proposals ahead of COP26. That is why we have been meeting regularly in my constituency to produce a Sheffield Hallam people's manifesto for COP26, bringing together campaigners, trade unionists, experts, economists, and people who just want to know how they can help to tackle the climate emergency. At a time when many feel voiceless, we aimed not only to put on record my constituents' strong belief that more can and should be done, but to make concrete proposals about what they believe must be done.

I have come here today, to this Chamber, to amplify that voice, and to ask for the COP26 president to meet my constituents and me tomorrow, when they present their manifesto to No. 10 Downing Street. The ideas in the manifesto are wide-ranging, speaking to policy on planning and local government, energy, transport, finance, food, nature, industrial strategy, and international climate justice. Above all, they speak to the dynamism and ingenuity of my constituents in imagining how to do things differently.

Ministers have a choice at COP26. They can watch the world burn comfortably from the windows of the conference centre, or they can let down the drawbridge and bridge the chasm between themselves and the people watching from their televisions at home or marching in the streets of Glasgow—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am sorry, but we have to leave it there. The winding-up speeches will begin at 3.15 pm. I call Bob Seely.

2.21 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I think I am going to be slightly off-message for most parties in the House, and perhaps even for the Government. I fully support the Government, I wish them well for COP26, and I support all the aims—who wouldn't? It is perfectly sensible to be looking after the planet better. But rather than apocalyptic doom-mongering and hair-shirted flagellation, we need proper policy making from this. While we all support those aims, we are responsible for 1% of the world's emissions, and even if we got it completely right, we would go down from 100% to 99%. Yes, we need to set an example—and I voted against the cut from 0.7% because I wanted us to be exporting green energy to the developing world—and let us be a first mover, but we need to keep a sense of perspective.

Scott Benton: On that point about a sense of perspective, is it not the case that the emissions from the UK amount to less than 1% of global carbon dioxide emissions, and while it is incredibly important that we do our bit, we do not have a magic wand and we cannot solve the problem on our own?

Bob Seely: My hon. Friend has summed up much of my speech, and I thank him for that.

Caroline Lucas: I am sorry, but I just want to set the record straight. It is not the case that the UK is responsible for only 1% of our global emissions. If we look for the emissions that are linked to the products we consume that we import from countries such as China, we will not find them on our balance sheet, because they are on China's balance sheet. That is not fair. We are responsible for far more than 1%, because of that and because of our historic cumulative emissions. Please let us have a debate based on fact.

Bob Seely: I completely agree. In fact, one of the points that I am coming to is that virtue-signalling about exporting our emissions is incredibly counter-productive. Half our emissions have come about purely because we have exported our guilt to other people. So I agree with the hon. Lady, and, by the way, I thank her for this debate.

Here are some specifics for the Minister. Shutting down our own gasfields while continuing to import gas from other countries is not sensible policy making. I had the privilege of talking to Chris Stark, one of the Government's senior climate advisers, who said that our renewables would be able to supply us in 15 or 20 years. We were discussing the issue in the context of security, especially in relation to Russian gas. Chris was absolutely right, but for the moment, whether we like it or not, we will be continuing to use that natural gas. It makes no sense, therefore, for the relevant committees to deny an extension of the Jackdaw gasfield when we are simply importing gas from elsewhere. We should consider the mileage and pollution costs of bringing gas here by ship, and the fact that we are getting it either from the middle east or, sadly, indirectly from Russia.

Let me come to the point made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). Half our emission gains in the last 20 years have been because we have been exporting our guilt, effectively to China. Again, it makes no sense. Every time we offshore jobs and wealth creation, we are offshoring them to a country that will take longer to cut its emissions, and has 300 coal-fired power stations. We should be onshoring jobs, because we will do a better job, however imperfectly, than others in trying to reduce the carbon emissions and making that more successful or, at least, less polluting.

We need to take people with us. Most of us here are talking to an important but relatively small part of the electorate who care passionately. Perhaps more people will in time; indeed, I am sure that they will. At the same time, however, we must talk to the people who are worried about bills—who are worried about keeping their families, their children or mum and dad warm this winter. If we do not take people with us, we will lose this debate. Hearing the Californian Windsors lecture *hoi polloi* from their private jets is hugely counter-productive. Again, we need a sense of realism.

There is a series of practical questions that I would like the Minister to answer. Does she agree that having a housing policy involving low density and greenfield development is no longer sustainable? We all know that the most carbon polluting form of housing is the kind of detached houses that we see in greenfield development. We need land use to be much more effective in this country, not only for quality of life and for plenty of reasons that people involved in planning care about, but also because of the environment.

Wind power is a great success story, and the sceptics have been proved absolutely wrong. Many of the wind turbines that we see out in the North sea are actually made on the Isle of Wight by Vestas. I am delighted that Vestas is there, and I hope that the Government will help me to ensure that it stays there, because it wants to increase the size of the massive blades that it is building. But what news on wave power? What news on tidal power? We have been waiting for years. We have very strong tides in this country, and while tidal power will never provide 100% of our energy supply, it could provide up to 10% or 15%.

Finally, and most important, there is nuclear power. We have avoided this for 10 or 15 years, much to our cost now. I congratulate the Government on the money that they are putting in, but we need to invest considerably in a series of small-scale Rolls-Royce nuclear reactors which will create jobs in this country, and to do it on an industrial basis.

Alexander Stafford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Seely: I will.

Alexander Stafford *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The hon. Gentleman had already given way twice; I am sorry about that.

2.27 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): “Code red for humanity”: that is what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has called this crisis. It says that we need to mobilise on a warlike footing if we are to prevent the human tragedy and conflict that would result from a failure to meet the 1.5° target.

The hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) and others have argued about money. What does it profit a man if he maximises the income to the Exchequer but loses his granddaughter’s future? The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that delaying action on climate change would double the UK’s national debt simply because of the cost of coping with the consequences of air pollution, flooding and heatwaves. The argument about finance is wholly on this side’s favour.

Delivery is delayed because of a skills deficit. We do not have a workforce that is trained to deliver energy efficiency targets. I should like to see all our car mechanics paid one day a week by the Government to retrain to service electric vehicles, and gas workers retraining to service hydrogen boilers. We need to retrain our offshore workers to work on wind turbines rather than oil rigs, and our construction workers to retrofit our 29 million homes. Until we have the workforce, we will never meet any targets and the costs will only increase.

Imperial College’s Energy Futures Lab has, I am afraid, given the lie to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) about nuclear. It has said that the rapidly reducing cost of solar and wind power means that nuclear is no longer a cost-effective pathway—yet more civil servants in Government are working on nuclear than are working on solar and wind.

One of the big announcements to be made at COP26 is about the global green grid, pioneered by the Climate Parliament, which I chair. It will establish a global system of interconnectors to take renewable energy

from where the sun is shining, where the wind is blowing, where the tides are coming in and going out, to where it is needed around the globe.

The COP has to deliver on these main things. Powering past coal is absolutely vital. The announcement from China that it would no longer fund coal-fired power generation in other countries was a critical step, but we now need China, India and Australia to get on board with the powering past coal convention. The delivery of the £100 billion a year to the developing world is about trust, and so is loss and damage. Addressing loss and damage is essential to building that trust. Low-lying countries and small island developing states cannot adapt to climate change, and they need compensation.

2.30 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I said in my maiden speech that the climate crisis was the most important issue we faced, and in the six years that have passed since then, it has got even more urgent each year. COP26 is the best chance we have of mitigating the damage and keeping the target of 1.5° alive, but as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said in her excellent opening speech, time is running out, for the people and the planet, but also for COP26 to be set up to succeed. In a week and a half, we will have to lead by example, to consolidate partnerships, and to crack down on the biggest polluters. We need ambitious updated nationally determined contributions. We need to honour and build on our commitments to climate finance for poorer countries, and we need strong action on biodiversity, fossil fuels and loss and damage. This is a big, big challenge.

On the positive side, in terms of our setting an example, we have some ambitious national plans and there are encouraging words in the net zero strategy. The Government are good at setting targets, and their own climate advisers rated them nine out of 10, but they gave them “somewhere below” four out of 10 for their efforts to meet them. We need to lead by our actions. We need real green investment in the upcoming spending review. We know that it makes sense and we know that it saves money in the longer term as well as saving the planet. If we can find money for the covid emergency, we need to find money for the climate emergency. We have to reduce investment in fossil fuels, whether it is oil in the Cambo field and at Horse Hill, coal in Cumbria or gas in Mozambique. We also need stronger action on ending UK taxpayer support for overseas fossil fuel projects, without the exemptions.

We also need funding for local government. We cannot deliver on the actions we need without local government action. The Climate Change Committee says that local authorities need proper funding to pursue successful plans such as retrofitting housing—where is the big retrofit programme that we need to decarbonise our homes?—building green homes, decarbonising local transport systems and improving waste and recycling infrastructure. On waste and recycling, I strongly agree with the hon. Lady’s comments on the cuts to the aid budget. One in three people globally do not have access to a waste management service and 90% of waste in lower-income countries ends up dumped or burned. The common practice of burning waste causes more emissions than aviation, so waste management systems need to be on the agenda at COP26. I asked about this in COP26 questions yesterday, but I did not really get an answer.

[Jeff Smith]

Like the planet, I am running out of time, so I will leave the last words to Kevin Anderson, Manchester University's professor of energy and climate change. He puts it very clearly:

"Climate change is essentially a cumulative problem (CO₂ builds up). So each day we don't deliver the level of CO₂ cuts for 1.5-2°C we go backwards—just not as big a retrograde step as it would otherwise have been, but backwards nonetheless."

Every day this problem is getting worse. We need to be honest about the challenge, and we need to step up and deliver on it.

2.33 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The climate emergency is a global crisis that we can solve only at a global level. International co-operation and mutual respect, especially with those countries who have been our long-term allies, are key ingredients for a successful COP26. Brexit and the continuing fall-out from it are a huge distraction. I am convinced that Britain could be far more effective in pulling reluctant countries who are not our allies, such as Russia and China, to the table if Europe could speak with one voice on the international stage.

The Government also have to get their own house in order. The big political difference is not about whether we are on the road to net zero but crucially the speed at which we go along that road. The greatest danger now is climate action delay. We are surrounded by powerful vested interests who want to continue with the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels for as long as possible. As long as the Government are allowing themselves to be dominated by those vested fossil fuel interests, we will miss the crucial targets of net zero. There have been many examples of this. Carbon capture and storage is about keeping the fossil fuel industry going, as is blue hydrogen. Those are examples of how the Government are clearly not acting in the interests of net zero. In all the big announcements prior to COP26, the biggest gap is any announcement about how to put big investment into the renewable energy sector. I agree with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) on this point. As an island country with lots of wind and water resources, the UK could indeed be a world leader in producing renewables. Are we missing our biggest and best opportunity here?

Is it any wonder that our young people, especially, are becoming increasingly anxious about the inaction of political leaders? A recent study co-authored by academics from the University of Bath has revealed the extent of climate anxiety among children and young people across 10 countries. My thanks to Caroline Hickman, Liz Marks and Elouise Mayall for sharing their research with me, and I urge the Minister to get a copy of that report. The most worrying aspect of their study is the feeling of betrayal reported by young people. It found that 65% of children and young people in the UK felt that the Government had failed them, 57% felt that the Government had betrayed them and 48% felt that they had had their concerns dismissed when they talked about the climate emergency. We are failing our young people. It is their future and their quality of life that is in question. I urge the Government to use their presidency to set out a vision of hope for the next generation.

2.36 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I am pleased to note that most Members here are well aware of the real threat and heightened risk that the climate emergency poses to the planet. We also know that with immediate concerted international action, it is still possible to limit the global temperature to 1.5°C in the long term. But the UK Government's Climate Change Committee itself has warned that the UK's national resilience to climate change is not keeping pace with the reality. We are not prepared here. Nearly 60% of the risks identified were given its highest threat rating, including loss of land, poor soil health due to flooding, risks to food supply and lack of drinking water. COP26 is not only our best chance; it might be one of our last. The UK's devolved nations can frankly no longer wait for the UK Government to show real leadership; they must be given a broader role. It is too important an event to be left entirely to a Prime Minister with so little self-awareness that he took a jet to the G7 talks in Cornwall.

My Scottish National party colleagues and I have been overwhelmed by the volume of constituents getting in touch to protest against the Cambo oil field, which the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister about, asking him to reconsider the plans in the light of the severity of the climate emergency we are facing. This is a UK Government who are seriously considering opening the first deep coalmine in 30 years. This is a Government who, just this week, again failed to back the development of Scotland's carbon capture and storage facility.

Bob Seely: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Deidre Brock: I cannot take any interventions, I am sorry.

One in 10 Aberdeen jobs are dependent on oil and gas. This is a community that feels every ebb and flow of the oil industry, and we are losing highly skilled people living in a naturally advantageous location with much of the necessary pipeline and subsea infrastructure already in place. That is absolutely senseless. Why are the Government not putting serious money into solutions that could solve the needs of heavy industry, such as hydrogen development as featured in the St Fergus proposal?

In the very short time I have left, I want to focus on loss and damage. Throughout the Brexit process, we heard time and again that this Government want the UK to stand on its own feet and be internationally admired by all. Well, here is their chance. The COP established the climate change impacts loss and damage mechanism in November 2013 in order to address the impacts of climate change in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to its effects. This mechanism's role was recognised at the Paris climate conference, but the countries that have historically been primary contributors to climate change have not formally established their financial obligations. It is essential that this is properly addressed during COP26. Developing nations are already bearing the brunt of climate change, and how we consider those countries in our decision making is to say who we are and how we wish to be judged by future generations.

Robbie Moore: The hon. Lady has been making good progress on stating how the devolved Administrations are doing a great job. Does she agree that burning plastic waste creates terrible pollutants that are released

into the atmosphere? The UK Government banned the burning of farm plastic waste in 2005, yet the Scottish Government banned it only in 2019.

Deidre Brock: I am sure we could all stand up and score points on a variety of things, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that matter has been addressed.

Scotland has established a climate justice fund, which we doubled this year. We feel that equity and justice must be at the heart of climate change action, and the establishment of a UK climate justice fund would send a powerful signal that previously marginalised voices will be heard. I want young people, indigenous communities and disadvantaged groups to have a say at COP26, as they are the most affected.

2020 held the record for the highest number of environmental activists murdered in one year, with 227 killed worldwide. That is a shocking statistic for many of us, but I am sure it is no surprise to indigenous communities that put their safety on the line every day and bear the brunt of these crimes simply for trying to protect their homes and communities. Their protests must not be in vain and should be recognised by the decisions we make at COP26.

2.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I welcome this debate and congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) not only on securing it but on all the work she has done over many years to bring environmental issues to the fore in this House.

I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for drawing attention to the fact that, on May Day 2019, this House became the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency, which I am pleased to say many local authorities across Britain, as well as other countries around the world, have also taken up.

We have to start at a local level because, in a sense, all politics is local. If we are to win the climate debate, it is not necessarily about convincing each other in this Chamber; it is about convincing a very large number of people that their living standards and livelihoods are not under threat by greening our environment, but that a green industrial revolution is a chance and an opportunity to create a high-skilled, high-paid workforce and to create the green energy jobs of the future. That will not be done if we rely on market forces; it will only be done through substantial public investment to achieve that transition to a green economy.

I was at an excellent meeting on Monday morning organised by Islington Council to launch its brilliant green agenda. It will mean better insulation in homes; transport initiatives; using waste heat from an underground station as part of a district heating scheme; using waste heat from a stepped down transformer owned by the national grid to heat a school and neighbouring properties; and installing a heat pump in a community centre to meet the passive house standard. I was struck that local authorities do not have enough planning powers to properly insulate places and properly demand of developers that we have solar panels and greened roof spaces and that we build buildings to last much longer than the planned obsolescence after 60 years before we knock them down again, with all the environmental costs of doing so.

It is also about waste disposal. In my borough we manage a 30% recycling rate, which is better than it was but is nowhere near good enough. The rate should be much higher. Reduce, reuse and recycle is important, but achieving it also requires the Government to support local authorities, and not planning greater levels of incineration all over the country, with the pollution that results.

Let us look at COP26 as a great opportunity for the sharing of technology and wealth across the world, for investment in biodiversity across the world and, above all, for the transfer of knowledge held by the richest countries to all on this planet. If we do not do that, global warming and extreme weather patterns will continue and, ultimately, everyone will suffer. There will be no hiding place, however rich we might be.

2.43 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The world came together in 2015 to set an historic ambition to limit global warming to 1.5°. Six years on, however, we are nowhere near meeting that target and instead we are fighting to keep the ambition alive. The conclusions of the IPCC report earlier this year were described by the UN Secretary-General as “code red for humanity.” It is now clear that we are in a state of crisis.

The world is now hotter than at any time in the past 12,000 years, over a million species are now threatened with extinction and this year every corner of the planet has experienced extreme weather, from devastating cyclones, hurricanes and storms to soaring temperatures, wildfires and flooding.

Action in this decade will be critical to preventing catastrophic climate breakdown, yet we know that the current pledges will not be enough to limit global temperature rises. Tackling the climate emergency can no longer be consigned as a problem for tomorrow. There is no more time for delay and no room for excuses.

When discussing the climate emergency, I often find myself thinking about my faith. Central to Islam is the idea of harmony with the natural world, and the Koran states:

“waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters.”

It also calls on Muslims to

“walk gently on the earth”.

And it calls on Muslims to treat our shared home with care and reverence.

Many Muslims are already coming together to protect our planet and to tackle the threat of global warming. In September, led by the Muslim Council of Britain, mosques across the country held a “Big Green Jummah” at Friday prayers, and the UK has its first eco-mosque in Cambridge. Earlier this week, Muslim organisations came together to issue a joint statement ahead of COP26 calling for urgent climate action.

With COP26 just around the corner, it is imperative that the Government lead by example. Climate action and green investment must begin at home, yet the Government have committed a measly £4 billion to fund low-carbon initiatives, a quarter of which has already been scrapped alongside the disastrous green homes grant. This small figure does not come close to matching the scale of the crisis we face.

[Afzal Khan]

While simultaneously failing to pump the necessary funds into green initiatives, the Government are supporting the opening of a new coalmine in Cumbria and the opening of the Cambo oil field. If nothing else, COP26 must signal the final death knell for coal and fossil fuels. The Government could set an example for the world by ending all oil and gas exploration in the UK and throwing their weight behind the shift to renewable energy.

My constituents in Manchester, Gorton care deeply for the future of our planet, and they are desperate for the Government to step up and act before it is too late.

2.46 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this important debate.

The climate emergency is the single biggest issue we face both nationally and globally. In order to prevent the most catastrophic consequences of global warming by limiting the increase to 1.5°, the climate must be a prism through which every political and economic decision is taken, yet it is clear that this Government are very far from where we need them to be in both leadership and action.

COP26 is a critical opportunity to secure a global agreement on the scale of climate action needed to limit global warming to 1.5°, but the UK Government risk squandering the precious opportunity we have as the host nation. There is scant evidence of a concerted diplomatic effort by the UK Government over the past two years to secure the attendance and commitment at COP26 of the most polluting nations, many of which are set to be absent from Glasgow. There is no evidence of a concerted effort to give confidence to the countries of the global south that the UK is committed to a just transition. Cutting UK aid in the run-up to hosting the COP is a disastrous approach to negotiation on carbon reduction measures.

The Government's approach to the UK's own net zero challenge is also falling far short. Publishing a net zero strategy at the last minute because hosting COP26 without one would be an international embarrassment is not the act of a Government sufficiently committed to climate action. Continuing to permit the exploration of new oilfields in the North sea and a new coalmine in Cumbria is not the act of a Government sufficiently committed to climate action. Failing to commit anything close to the scale of the investment required to deliver the speed of transition we need is not the act of a Government sufficiently committed to climate action.

In contrast, our local councils are delivering at pace. I am proud of both Lambeth and Southwark Councils, which were among the first in the country to declare a climate emergency and are both making climate action a top priority. But they need both additional resources and powers to make the scale of change that the climate emergency demands, including in relation to the planning system, where tackling the climate emergency must become a core aim.

When I was first elected in 2015, I brought together organisations and individuals in my constituency who care about climate change and we formed an organisation called the Dulwich and West Norwood Climate Coalition.

Next week, we will deliver our letter to the Prime Minister ahead of COP26, signed by hundreds of local residents and community organisations. We ask him to secure the agreement we all need to tackle the climate emergency and secure the just transition that we need. My constituents across Dulwich and West Norwood understand the scale and the gravity of the climate emergency. Many are already doing everything they can to reduce carbon emissions. They are desperately looking to the Government to show leadership on the international stage, and secure the scale and ambition of agreement necessary to secure the future of our planet for our children and grandchildren.

2.50 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The climate and environment crisis is a key issue for my constituents. They recognise that this crisis is an inequality issue, that the poorest nations and the poorest people within all nations will be affected, and that without taking the actions that are needed, the survival of future generations is under threat. The impacts of climate change on human health are clear. We see this on the news almost every day: rising temperatures, pollution and an increased frequency of extreme weather events are already causing severe impacts on human health, as well as on planetary health.

As I mentioned, the most dramatic impacts of the climate crisis are on deprived communities: landslides caused by deforestation; the industrial pollution of water supplies; and the suffering of old and young trying to escape rising temperatures while living in makeshift homes. In 2019, environmental disasters displaced more than 25 million people in 145 countries and territories. In the UK, extreme weather events also have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, including older people, people on lower incomes, and others who may live in more polluted areas with less green space. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said in her excellent speech, despite the UK's recent commitments to reaching net zero by 2050, we know that progress is not sufficient to reach net zero targets. The third UK climate risk assessment shows that only half the risks and opportunities identified are having the action that they need. It is ridiculous that the Government are even considering giving approval to drilling the Cambo oilfield.

The agenda on housing, fuel poverty and affordable low-carbon warmth is of vital importance to the public's health. We must do more on that, as it will help in reducing our carbon emissions and ensuring that people are warm. Similarly, we need to have a better and greater impact on the transport system. Although I welcome what has been committed to, we need to recognise that in Greater Manchester a single fare is £4-odd, whereas in London it is £1.40. Finally, we must commit to an economic recovery that is healthy, green and sustainable, and has equity at its heart.

2.52 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): First, I require to put on record the fact that it is perverse that COP26 is taking place in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, yet the Scottish Government will not be formally represented. That said, this is not a constitutional debate. I accept that this is the issue of our time and national boundaries

will not be respected by global warming. Therefore, everything has to be subservient to that, but there is an issue there.

As many have said, this is the issue of our time. It challenges humanity and every other species. It is not just ourselves who live on this planet; it is a wondrous planet, which we recognise. I recall reading as a child about the extinction of the dodo. A child now would have an almost limitless book of species that are being wiped out. We are doing incredible harm to animals and wildlife that lack the consciousness of what is befalling them, done by us. We have to change that, because otherwise the future for our children and grandchildren will be grim indeed. They will curse us if we do not take action, and speedily. Neither superheroes nor science will be able to save us. We do have to change.

I recall reading the book by the author and scientist Jared Diamond on civilisations, in which he wondered why those on Easter Island, which was once populated, had cut down the forests that existed there and then the final tree, meaning that life could no longer continue there. He was unable to give a precise reason, but it did show that societies can bring about their own demise. What happened to Easter Island could be a microcosm of what happens to our whole planet if we do not make changes—and soon.

Climate change is disproportionately affecting the poor. Of course, wealthy countries and, indeed, wealthy individuals can try to insulate themselves but, as we have seen with the tragedies in California and Germany, it does not matter how wealthy a society is: the change to weather patterns will not recognise that and pass by. That said, climate change will, as others have said, impact disproportionately on the poor not simply in our own land but throughout the developed world and around the globe. Those nations that are least able to afford it will face the harshest consequences. There are issues relating to what we have to do, because we will have to subsidise. We have had more than our fair share. We may not be generating, and we can argue over the precise percentage, but we contributed in the past and have to recognise that others must have an opportunity and we have to change.

Finally, we have to take people with us and have a transition. Wind turbines are going up in my constituency, as they are off the whole eastern coast of Scotland, yet we are not seeing the jobs coming for the manufacturing of turbines or the benefits coming to our community. We are going to see cabling to take the energy created off Scotland's shores down to the north-east of England. That is not right.

2.55 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): We are living in the most important moment of human history, when our actions will determine whether we prevent climate catastrophe. If we fail to rise to the challenge, billions of lives will be devastated, unimaginable numbers of lives will be lost and the existence of much of life on Earth will be put in real danger. When the IPCC warns of code red for humanity and NASA scientists warn of climate emergency, we must act like we are in an emergency—because we are.

Words are cheap; action is how our generation will be judged. That means doing everything possible to avoid the 1.5° tipping point, at which point all sorts of devastating

climate domino effects kick in. With current warming of 1.2°, we already have devastating fires in Greece, deadly floods in New York and much worse elsewhere. It will get worse no matter what we do, but every fraction of every degree makes a huge difference. For example, the climate impacts of 1.5° and 2° of warming are worlds apart. That change is the difference between life and death for low-lying coastal countries such as Bangladesh. At 2°, 420 million more people will face extreme heat waves and 200 million more people will be exposed to increased water scarcity. All that is frightening, but what is even more frightening is that we are on track for not even 2° but nearer to 3° of warming. The consequences do not bear thinking about.

A thin layer of green wash will not achieve 1.5°. If we rely on the same broken economic model that brought us to the brink of disaster, we will not achieve 1.5°. We must treat this as what it is: the biggest battle that we have ever faced. We need to get on a war footing, which means that every decision and budget decision must be focused on this emergency. Every part of our vast capacity—human talent, machinery and financial—must focus on this emergency. It means ending all new fossil fuel production and shifting fossil fuel subsidies into renewables. It means technology-sharing and delivering the \$100 billion per year financing commitment to those countries most likely to be hit by, but least responsible for, this catastrophe. What we do not need is what our Government are doing: plans for more oil and coal fields and ambitious targets backed up with inadequate plans and woeful levels of funding.

But there is hope: we have the policies needed to prevent catastrophe, summed up in a green new deal. We have the alternative technology; currently, we do not have the political will. Climate catastrophe does not have to be our destiny: it is a matter of choice.

2.58 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and the Backbench Business Committee for securing this urgent debate.

When I visit schools and community groups throughout my Vauxhall constituency, I am struck by how evident this issue is for so many people, including some of the young people in primary schools. They see that it is an emergency; I am not sure why our Government do not. The impact of this issue is felt by so many constituents in Vauxhall, and I pay tribute to the many of them who wrote to me to urge me to take part in this really important debate. It is clear that human activity is responsible for this catastrophic rise in global temperatures. This rise is already making much of the polluted world uncomfortable to live in, and will lead to some of it becoming uninhabitable. We can already see the impacts. In September 2017, the people of Dominica saw their lives turned upside down when category 5 Hurricane Maria destroyed much of the island's infrastructure, left much of the population homeless and wiped out key parts of the country's economic sectors.

Overall, Hurricane Maria cost the lives of 3,000 people and the economies affected nearly £70 billion. In just three weeks, that one storm cost the world the same amount as our furlough scheme in the UK. The failure by Governments to tackle this climate catastrophe is

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

making and will continue to make hurricanes much stronger and impactful. Maria was far from unique. We saw many other hurricanes. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma wrecked the US south coast and the Caribbean.

There is an obvious and moral case for tackling this climate catastrophe, but perhaps what appals me the most is the lack of urgency in tackling it. I am afraid that that lack of urgency is also being shown by our Government here. We are placing a huge burden on the lives of our children and future generations. There will be more hurricanes, more rising sea levels, more frequent flooding and more droughts if we do not take action now. This will come and it will come fast.

That future does not have to be inevitable. We have to take a long look at what we are doing. We need to act today to move to a truly green and sustainable planet. Let us see an end to the peppercorn sprinkling by our Government that barely scratches the surface of what is happening. Let us commit to properly fund a new deal and make sure that we are ambitious in tackling this climate change head-on.

3.1 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this vital debate and for allowing me the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

When I think of my postbag there are two policy issues that dominate the correspondence that I receive from constituents in North East Fife—climate change and making ends meet, whether that be mitigating rising costs or surviving the cuts to universal credit. Some might see those two policy areas as being in contradiction, but that is not how I and my constituents see it. Both areas are about the social contract and our obligations to each other and to future generations.

The publication of the Government's net zero strategy yesterday ahead of COP26 did bring some good news, not least their formal recognition of the need to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°. But, as other Members have said, there is still a lot missing. I welcome the move to phase out gas boilers, but we know that heat pumps are not perfect, that the grants are not sufficient and that they are only part of the answer without proper investment in home insulation. I welcome the increase in funding for offshore wind, but was disappointed to see nothing on the phasing out of fossil fuels. That needs to be a key focus of all Governments within the UK. We need to ensure that we are accelerating change in the demand profile across all sectors and helping people to do their bit.

We all know that we are in a climate crisis. The real impacts may not yet be evidenced in SW1A—although I am sure that we all saw the flooding in Norman Shaw South—but they are certainly clear to those of us in rural and coastal constituencies. Freuchie Mill in North East Fife has been severely flooded multiple times in the last 18 months and coastal erosion is a real issue for areas of natural beauty such as Tentsmuir. However, that is nothing compared with what is happening in the global south, where people are experiencing the most devastating impacts of a crisis that they had the least to do with creating. I was saddened, but not entirely surprised, to read in the news today about the lobbying

by developed nations against shifting away from fossil fuels and committing to the UN's annual fund to help countries on the frontline of climate change—a fund that was agreed in 2010, but which has never been fully committed to, and that clearly needs to be readdressed at COP26.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), who is no longer in his place, called for more positivity. When I look at what is happening in my constituency in terms of community activism, I do feel positive. Last month, I had the privilege of attending, for the second time, the Line in the Sand event at St Andrews, where students, staff, school pupils and others gather as part of the global climate strike. My message to them was the same as my message today: there are hard choices to be made by all of us and it is our duty as parliamentarians to advocate to ensure that Governments make it as easy as possible for people to make that transition. It is about recommitting to our global social contract. I ask the Minister and the Government to join me in making that commitment—truly making it and actually doing what is needed to make tangible change.

3.4 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for leading the debate excellently and for the hard work that she does in this House to bring attention to these issues; whatever party we belong to, we all recognise that. It is not only the hon. Lady who brings my attention to such issues. My constituents tell me every week the issues that matter to them, so I am not quite sure why some Members have said that this is not a big issue. Actually, it is a massive issue for my constituents and they regularly contact me to tell me that.

As the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) mentioned just a moment ago, global temperature rises have been a consistent problem worldwide and this issue needs to be at the forefront of the COP26 discussions. It has been estimated that, to have at least a 50% chance of keeping the global temperature below 2°C throughout the 21st century, the cumulative carbon emissions between 2011 and 2050 need to be limited. But in this year—2021—the greenhouse gas emissions contained in certain estimates of global fossil fuel reserves are about three times higher than they should be. That gives us an idea of the importance of the issue.

I want to mention some of the good work that is happening. One company that got in touch with me was ADS Northern Ireland, which has previously worked closely with Bombardier Aerospace back home. It outlined how the aviation industry is helping to reduce emissions to net zero. The UK aerospace industry supports what the Government call their jet zero ambitions, and states that the realisation of these goals will present the UK with huge opportunities to boost clean growth, level up and create green jobs across the whole UK. We need that in Northern Ireland, and we can do that. With that in mind, the devolved institutions will aim to deliver the jet zero ambitions, strengthen the supply chain, create green jobs and enable the UK aerospace industry to become a world leader in sustainable aircraft technology.

The UK must be at the forefront of persuading others to commit fully to the nationally determined contributions and the Paris agreement, and our actions must speak louder than our words. This year's COP26

gives us a real opportunity to engage with those who have been less vocal on the climate change front. I commend the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for saying that it will give young people a chance to raise the issues that are important to them. That is really important, because we are leaving this situation for those who come after us.

I look to the COP26 President to lead us through the conference with realism and consideration for our futures. Although we have achieved much and are travelling in the right direction, it is estimated that some £100 billion is still needed. I thank him for the work that he has done. We look forward to working hard together for the future.

We in this place have a duty to ensure that the burden is not felt by one income base. I urge the Government to spread what will be an incredibly costly initiative appropriately, and not to squeeze the middle class any further. This must be done and it must be done right, and now is the time to do just that.

3.7 pm

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the Backbench Business Committee and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate, and everyone who has taken part in it this afternoon.

We are days away from the start of COP26—one of the most important gatherings of world leaders ever to have taken place. They are coming to Glasgow with one job: to make good on the promise to cut global emissions and restrict global warming to 1.5°C, and to give the world a fighting chance in the war against climate change, because right now it is a war that we are losing. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres pointed out just last month that the national determined contributions that have been submitted so far put us on track for 2.7°C. That is not nearly enough.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of COP26. Glasgow is possibly our last chance, because the world has not lived up to what it promised in Paris. We should be in absolutely no doubt that, if we are to make up for that lost decade, it will require leadership, it will take courage and it will mean sacrifice on the part of us all. But there is no alternative. There are no other options. It has to be done and it has to be done now. As we have heard, the code red for humanity was absolutely clear: global climate change is accelerating, and human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are the overwhelming cause of that climate change. The UN Secretary-General said of that report—and who could disagree?—that this

“must sound a death knell”

for fossil fuels. Of course, he is not the first UN leader to highlight the issue of climate change. In 2016, his predecessor, Ban Ki-moon addressed the Arctic Circle Assembly and described the Arctic as the ground zero of climate change, highlighting that a temperature increase of 2° worldwide could well mean a temperature increase of 4°, 5°, 6° or even more in the Arctic. Last week I attended the most recent Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik. Not surprisingly, the alarming rate of climate change experienced in the Arctic and the effects that it will have there, here and across the world were high on the agenda, with scientists confirming that, with just 20% of the Greenlandic ice sheet melting, global seas will rise by 2 metres.

Earlier this week, I attended yet another excellent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on the polar regions, at which UK and US scientists working on the colossal Thwaites glacier in Antarctica spoke in detail of the evidence they have of that glacier melting and the billions of tonnes of ice that fall into the ocean every single year, with the inevitable rise in sea levels that will follow. That is a stark reminder that, although the Arctic and the Antarctic can sometimes seem remote, they are not, and what happens at the poles has huge consequences for the planet as a whole. We are in a critical situation whereby the poles are melting, sea levels are rising and great swathes of the planet are rapidly becoming too hot for human habitation. Across the rest of the planet, already this year we have witnessed wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and unparalleled levels of rainfall in Europe, Asia and Africa. Given what we have seen, surely no one could disagree with the Secretary-General of the United Nations when he said that we are “on a catastrophic path” and:

“We can either save our world or condemn humanity to a hellish future.”

That is why COP26 has to succeed.

Last night I met my constituents who had organised a meeting through Time for Change Argyll & Bute. They wanted to make sure that I, as their MP, knew exactly what they expected of me, of the Scottish Government and of the UK Government ahead of COP. That included telling the UK Government and the Prime Minister that they must now live up to what was promised in Paris and guarantee to restrict global warming to 1.5°—that there can be no more horse-trading and trying to fudge this issue, and that Glasgow has to be the turning point for the world that Paris should have been; now, tragically, it has to be seen as a squandered opportunity. I know I am not alone in engaging with constituents on this issue. Last week my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who has just escaped the Elections Bill Committee—taking one for the team to allow me to speak in this debate—spoke to his constituents in an online forum about exactly these issues.

COP26 cannot be Government to Government or business to business; as much as it possibly can, it has to be a people’s COP. Whether in Argyll and Bute or Glasgow North, the indigenous people of the rain forest, the Inuit people of Greenland and Canada or the people of the low-lying Pacific islands, the people of the world who are going to be most affected by this have to be heard, and not just heard but listened to, because for far too long the people who have least responsibility for creating this emergency are bearing the brunt of its consequences.

This morning I attended a meeting organised by Christian Aid to talk about loss and damage and what has to be a core principle of climate justice. We were joined by people from Bangladesh and Nigeria who spoke about exactly that—how the global north has created a problem that the global south is now having to live with, every single day. Between them, historically—it is important that we think in historical terms—the global north of the UK, Canada, Russia and the United States has produced 50% of the world’s harmful emissions, while Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Chad, Niger, Malawi, Zambia and Madagascar, combined, have contributed 0.08% of harmful emissions. Yet today Madagascar is experiencing

[Brendan O'Hara]

its worst drought in 40 years and is facing a catastrophic famine. It is a major problem for the global south, and we as the global north have to take responsibility for it. Since 2020, Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, has suffered damages estimated at around \$2 billion because of natural disasters, including cyclones, floods and rising sea levels. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) in congratulating the Scottish Government on being so determined to make this a people's COP and for setting up the world's first climate justice fund to support vulnerable communities in Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda to address the impact of climate change. It would send a wonderful message to the rest of the world if the United Kingdom Government set up their own climate justice fund ahead of COP26.

3.15 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to respond to this debate, and I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing it and her powerful opening remarks. It has, as expected, been a wide-ranging debate with a large number of thoughtful and passionate contributions. Hon. and right hon. Members on both sides, particularly my own, will forgive me if I do not mention every one of them, but I feel I need to make an exception—perhaps put it down to old habits dying hard—to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown), who brought home very early on in the debate the importance of the matter we are discussing.

Many critical issues need to be resolved at COP26, from finalising the Paris rulebook to essential specific side deals on such issues as the phasing out of coal, reductions in methane emissions and deforestation. However, given the prominent themes of this afternoon's debate, I will focus my remarks on two key areas where decisive progress must be made at COP26, if it is not to be deemed a failure. The first is whether sufficiently ambitious near-term climate commitments can be secured to at least keep alive the hope of limiting global heating to 1.5°C. The second is whether the developed world will finally deliver for the developing in terms of climate finance and other forms of support.

Turning first to near-term climate commitments, in his speech in Paris last week the COP President argued that

“the world must deliver an outcome which keeps 1.5 degrees in reach.”

He was right to set himself and the world that test. Opposition Members have long called for delivering on the upper ambition of the Paris agreement to be the overriding priority for the conference. Anything else would send a clear signal that the UK was content to aim for an outcome that puts at risk, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) said in his remarks, the very survival of vulnerable states on the frontline of the climate crisis.

The problem is that the Government have not done enough to explain what they mean by “keep 1.5 alive” or to initiate an open and transparent debate on the scale of global ambition required to achieve that outcome.

As a result, we are heading into Glasgow with no real collective understanding of what is necessary to keep a limit of 1.5° within reach and every chance that the outcome will therefore fall far short of the expectations that have been generated.

That failure is all the more perplexing given how clear the science is. We know that for a 50% chance of staying below 1.5°, we need to halve global emissions by the end of this decade. We know that as a world, we are alarmingly off track, with the nationally determined contributions synthesis report published by the United Nations framework convention on climate change last month making it clear that, far from slashing emissions as required, current country pledges would lead to an increase in emissions of around 16% on 2010 levels by 2030, putting us on course for a disastrous 2.7° of heating, as many Members have said. I say to the Minister that the Government must now be open and honest with the country and the world about how much of the gap needs to be closed at Glasgow to keep 1.5° alive and what individual countries must do, in particular those major emitters who have yet to submit updated pledges, for that happen.

The Government also need to be clear about what more the world will have to do in the next few years, post COP26, to close the gap entirely. It is now abundantly clear that we cannot wait four years, or even until the global stocktake in 2023, to increase global ambition still further, if the world is to be put firmly on a 1.5° pathway. The Climate Vulnerable Forum recently proposed an emergency pact that would see states agree to return at each of the next three COPs with more ambitious targets, rather than waiting until 2025. It was telling that the COP President alluded to that proposal in his speech in Paris last week. When she responds, will the Minister confirm whether the COP President will be actively seeking agreement in Glasgow on a more regular ratchet mechanism to ensure that we make the requisite progress on mitigation in this decisive decade?

On the developing world, as Opposition Members have said many times in the last 18 months, it is vital that the voice of the global south is heard in Glasgow and that climate justice be prioritised. That is not just because it is morally right but because the negotiations are almost certain to break down if high-ambition developed countries do not retain the trust of, and thus secure buy-in from, climate-vulnerable states.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome), for Leeds East and for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), and others, said, more than anything, solidarity with those states is dependent on the developed world finally honouring the 2009 promise of \$100 billion in climate finance annually to help developing nations to transition and adapt. Yet, with just 10 days left, a staggering \$14-billion shortfall remains, and there is no sign of the promised German-Canadian delivery plan. We need clarity from the Government as to what progress they now expect on that issue before delegates arrive in Glasgow, and I urge the Minister to update the House on that.

As important as that \$100 billion is, it is not the extent of the finance and support that developing countries will need. The world also needs to agree a significant increase on the \$100 billion for the period up to 2025; to begin the process of establishing a post-2025 climate finance goal; to make tangible progress on ensuring that

at least half of all climate funding is allocated to adaptation and that the balance shifts away from loans towards grants; and to deliver meaningful support, including financing, to address loss and damage and get the Santiago Network up and running, as the hon. Members for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) and for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) mentioned. Demands for progress in each of those areas have been made at COP after COP after COP, and Glasgow must be the occasion when the developed world finally acts to deliver on them.

Finally, I will touch briefly on the domestic situation, which has been a prominent theme of the debate. Of course the summit's outcome will be shaped by prevailing geopolitical headwinds and any agreement that emerges will be the product of a phenomenally complex international negotiation, but it would be wrong to portray the role of the COP President as merely a convener or neutral broker. Those are key aspects of the role, but being the host state also confers on us a duty to set the pace on all aspects of the net zero transition and so maximise our influence in the negotiations and the chance of a successful outcome.

Opposition Members do not deny that the UK has set an example in several important areas, including publishing a detailed, albeit flawed, net zero strategy. One need only look, however, at the Treasury's failure to lock in a genuinely green economic recovery by decisively closing the net zero investment gap to see that the Government have patently not been an exemplar across the board on climate policy and that there is much more they could do.

COP26 is our last best chance to show that the Paris agreement and climate multilateralism more generally work. Whether it is convincing G20 countries to do more, delivering for the developing world, or revisiting what exemplary climate action might be taken in the Budget and the comprehensive spending review here at home, the Government must now do whatever it takes to ensure this critical summit is the "turning point for humanity" that the Prime Minister has declared it will be.

3.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): Temperatures are certainly rising in this Chamber, which demonstrates the passion for the issue on both sides. We have some varying and different views, but we all agree that this is a crisis that we have to tackle. Today's debate highlights how critical COP26 is in securing the commitments we need to keep the temperature rises that are so affecting climate change to 1.5° of warming, and to bring us towards our goals of the Paris agreement and the UN framework convention on climate change.

Although I respect the passion of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), and her leaning for the agenda—indeed, we worked closely together on much of it over the years when I was a Back Bencher—I was dismayed by her total negativity. I thank Members on the Government Benches for their positivity about the agenda, as well as the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) who made a positive speech.

Before I turn to the international agenda, I want to thank our local groups and initiatives for their work on the ground, such as the Bishop's Stortford Climate

Group, the Gloucestershire tree planters, Climate Action Ilkley, my own Somerset UK Youth Parliament and the projects that were mentioned in Islington North. They are doing so much on this agenda. It is important to bring the people with us, and we can.

To go back to COP26, ahead of the event the President-designate and Ministers have been asking countries to deliver on our four key goals: emission reductions, adaptation, finance and working together. On emissions, when the UK took over the COP26 presidency, less than 30% of the global economy was covered by a net zero target, and now 80% of the global economy has a net zero or a carbon neutrality commitment and over 100 countries have submitted or enhanced their 2030 targets. I call that good progress.

Increasing ambition and action on adaptation is an absolutely key COP26 priority, with actions backing it up, and the adaptation action coalition is working on sharing knowledge and good practices. Finance, which has been heavily touched on today, is absolutely key to this agenda. The \$100 billion that developed countries have committed to is about trust, and it is critical in helping developing countries to transition to cleaner economies and to protect those worst affected by the impacts of climate change. I think all hon. Members and my hon. Friends across these Benches understand that.

By the way, we will actually spend more in percentage terms on international development than America, Japan and Canada, contrary to some of the things being spread by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion. We have a huge focus on finance. We have doubled our international climate finance to at least £11.6 billion between 2020 and 2025. We have two new finance initiatives under way for biodiversity funding.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Minister give way?

Rebecca Pow: I will not give way, because I do not have much time, sadly.

Some 75 financial institutions representing €12 trillion have committed to protecting and restoring biodiversity investment in relation to climate change, and the Green Climate Fund is providing \$9 billion to restore ecosystems. I very much hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) said about climate finance transparency. I think this is all so important.

We have seen significant progress at the UN General Assembly. The UN has committed to doubling funding to \$11.4 billion, which was followed by announcements from the European Commission, Denmark, Sweden, Monaco, Canada, Japan, Germany, the UK, France and the EU. So there is a great deal going on on this agenda, which is not to say that more is not also needed. The COP President-designate has been liaising with countries around the world to get them on board, and to get them to share their commitments because, as everyone has said today, this is not just about the UK.

We are seeing extreme weather conditions all around us, with extreme flooding, wildfires and, even here, flash floods, as well as the terrible climate-induced famine in Madagascar that was referred to eloquently. This has really focused the mind—has it not?—on the fact that this is real, and we have to deal with it. That brings me to how our net zero strategy demonstrates that this Government understand that. This is moving us to

[Rebecca Pow]

clean power, with hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs on this agenda, and leveraging in £90 billion of private investment.

Bob Seely: Will the Minister give way?

Rebecca Pow: I will not give way.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) said, there is a skills and training agenda to back this up. People from the oil industry are already transitioning to the offshore wind, and indeed to geothermal power in Cornwall. I went to have a look at that myself, and what an exciting project that is and could be.

The Prime Minister did such good work at the G7. Just this week, he announced at the global investment summit 18 new trade and investment deals, which will support green growth and create at least another 30,000 new jobs across the UK, thanks to £9.7 billion of foreign investment. It has been quite a week.

That brings me to nature. We must not forget that, because the other side of the climate change coin is biodiversity loss. That is where I come in as the nature recovery Minister, and it is why this Government have made that such a priority. We have committed in law to halt the decline of species abundance by 2030. No other country has done this. It is an amazing commitment, and we should not forget it.

We worked further on the Environment Bill in this House last night, and I think that that shows what a priority nature recovery is. The convention on biological diversity from COP15, and the Kunming declaration, also committed to bending the curve on biodiversity loss. So much is going on, and our nature-based solution work in this country is committed to demonstrating, at home, that we can use nature to tackle climate change. That then brings so many other benefits and spinoffs in holding water, restoring flooding, and so much else.

At COP26 we have a nature day, which we are making an absolute priority. We will also focus on deforestation around the world, as that is an important part of what we will be doing. The forest, agriculture and commodity trade dialogue will be under way at COP26, as will the US lowering emissions by accelerating the forest finance initiative. We are taking action on climate change. We are leading by example and we are bringing others with

us. Yes, it is an emergency and we have to do something about it, but we cannot be continuously negative. We have to be positive, lead by example, and take advantage of the opportunity in Glasgow.

3.30 pm

Caroline Lucas: I am truly grateful for all contributions from my honourable colleagues. If I have seemed ungrateful, Minister, that is because when it comes to the Government's efforts, what matters is what the climate science demands. The climate science does not care whether the Government are making their best efforts or about their targets. It does not care whether we are doing slightly better; it cares only about whether we are doing more to reduce the amount of carbon being pumped into the atmosphere and whether we are doing enough, and on that, I am afraid, we are not. However, I agree that this debate does not have to be about doom and gloom, and as well as huge risks there are huge opportunities. It is the frustration that many of us feel that the Government are not harnessing those opportunities that makes us feel so angry. Again and again we have seen the Treasury dragging its feet—we know; we have seen the leaked documents—when it comes to the ambitious actions we need. It is no good the Minister saying simply that we have to do something; the point is that we have to do enough, and we have to do it fast, and she is not.

My final point is about young people. At the Youth4Climate summit in Milan last month the Prime Minister said to young people:

“Your future is being stolen before your eyes...you have every right to be angry with those who aren't doing enough to stop it”.

On behalf of those young people, for whom many of us have spoken today, we are all angry. However, being angry is not enough as we need also to be active. In that spirit, will the Minister urge the Prime Minister to accept the invitation that was sent to him by young people several weeks ago, to join a roundtable with the leaders of the other Westminster parties and discuss climate change? That follows a similar roundtable in 2019 with Greta Thunberg. If the Prime Minister is serious about putting his fine words into action, he could accept that invitation from those young people, sit down with them, hear from them, and finally act.

Question put and agreed to,

Resolved,

That this House has considered COP26 and limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

World Menopause Month

3.33 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered World Menopause Month.

It is rare to stand up in this place and open with the words, “This is not a political issue”, but that is what I am doing today. Women’s health is too important to be used to gain political advantage or score points against each other. Women’s health is so important, and women have suffered for far too long. To stop that we must work together across the House to bring about change. Today is just the start. Today we can talk about the perimenopause and menopause, and we can share our experiences and discuss all the areas that desperately need change. In doing so, we will break the taboo. Breaking the taboo is a huge step forward, but it does not stop there. Talking is great, but action is better.

The menopause is something that every woman will experience at some point in her lifetime. When and how we experience it is unique to each of us. For some, it will be a simple transition with relatively few side-effects. For others, the side-effects will be extreme—physically painful, mentally challenging and, at their peak, completely debilitating.

It is estimated that 13 million women in the UK are either perimenopausal or menopausal. That is almost a fifth of the population. Can we imagine any other condition that affects that many people being so woefully overlooked and misunderstood? This issue is not just about the women experiencing the symptoms; its impact directly affects husbands, partners, children, friends and colleagues. It really is an issue that we need to take seriously.

Next Friday, my private Member’s Bill, the Menopause (Support and Services) Bill, comes to this place for its Second Reading. I have been blown away by the support I have received from Members right across this House and the other place, and from outside—the press, celebrities, the general public and businesses. It seems that finally, after years of whispered comments and clandestine conversations, everyone is ready to talk about the menopause. Women are ready to stand up and share their experiences.

Hot flushes, night sweats, brain fog, weight gain, insomnia, anxiety, vaginal dryness, poor concentration—I could go on; the list is endless. Hormone imbalance does all those things to our bodies. For many, help is available in the form of hormone replacement therapy. It is not for everyone, but for those of us it does suit, including me, it is honestly life changing. After 11 years on antidepressants, I am now on HRT and weaning myself off antidepressants, having realised that I was not having a nervous breakdown but actually going through the menopause. I have been on HRT for only a relatively short time, but I did not realise how much of me I had lost to the menopause until I started taking it.

Despite the fact that HRT makes such a difference to so many of us—it is no exaggeration to say that it can quite literally save women’s lives—it remains the only hormone medication that is not exempt from prescription charges in England. For many, because they need both progesterone and oestrogen, the cost is double. I can guarantee that mums on a tight budget will make sure that their kids have everything they need before finding

the £20 to pay for the prescription, which means that that cost is a real barrier for many women up and down the country. But we can change that—and I hope that we will with my Bill. Every MP in England will have constituents who would benefit from that change in legislation. We cannot let them down.

Let us look at what else we can do, once we have broken down the financial barrier, to reduce the impact on women’s lives during the perimenopause and menopause. Let us look at where else women are being failed. Menopause training in medical schools is unacceptably poor, with 41% offering no mandatory menopause training at all. Curriculum content in schools needs to be reviewed so that the next generation of girls and boys are educated and prepared for this stage of their lives.

Support in the workplace is still a lottery, with some employers excelling but others letting their employees down at a really difficult time. The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), with whom I work closely on this issue, will speak later about workplace support and the excellent work being done by the Women and Equalities Committee, but I want briefly to mention a few companies that are really taking the issue seriously. Yesterday, the all-party parliamentary group on menopause held a session focused on workplace support, and we heard some really good examples of best practice from PricewaterhouseCoopers, Network Rail, Bristol Myers Squibb, Tesco and John Lewis. We also heard from Timpson. James Timpson—the man walks on water! He announced on Monday that Timpson will be allowing staff to claim back their HRT prescription charges on expenses. I cannot praise the man enough. This is a true example of a company that cares about the welfare of its employees and understands that in offering this benefit it will retain its experienced workforce who are invaluable.

The fact that so many organisations are starting to wake up to this is such a positive step forward. It is a joy to be able to stand here today and celebrate that, but we need it to be the norm, not the exception. The UK’s workforce is changing. More than three-quarters of menopausal women are now in employment. We need employers to change, too, so that women feel comfortable speaking to their managers about their symptoms and what adjustments they need. In fact, we need to educate everyone, so that talking about the menopause with medical professionals, among friends and within families, as well as in the workplace, becomes a natural thing for women to do.

Earlier this year, ahead of a Westminster Hall debate that had the topic of menopause support, the Chamber engagement team helped me hugely by creating a survey for anyone impacted by the menopause to share their experiences. I was taken aback by the number of responses we received in just a couple of days, and by how honest and insightful they were. Looking again at those responses and at the hundreds of emails coming into my inbox makes me realise just how many women out there are now ready to reach out and share their experiences. I am honoured that they are choosing to do that, but it saddens me that many of them have never spoken about their symptoms with anyone else.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is impossible to resist any campaign spearheaded by the hon. Lady and this is one I am very proud indeed to be able to

[Mr William Wragg]

support. I look forward to the Second Reading of her private Member's Bill next week, which I will be here to support. What would she say to the men out there as to how they can be supportive and better understand the menopause, rather than treat it as a taboo subject?

Carolyn Harris: I would say, "Take the example of the hon. Gentleman, who has become a menopause warrior: be there for the women in your lives and make sure you provide listening ears and thoughtful words on how you can support your loved ones and the women in your workplaces."

I understand that women have found it difficult to talk, because across society we have been encouraged not to. A funny story, but a very true story, is that I remember my mum ushering me out of a room when her and my aunts were discussing a "rather difficult sensitive issue". One of my aunts will probably be absolutely horrified that I am talking about this now. They were discussing her menopause. I hasten to add that I was 36 years of age at the time—[Laughter.]—but that just goes to show the taboo around talking about this subject. There will be some people out there who will be absolutely astounded that I used the expression "vaginal dryness" in the Chamber of the House of Commons, but it is a fact of life.

The stories that women are sharing with me are often really distressing: from women who have struggled for years with no support and feel it has ruined their lives, to women who have experienced early menopause due to medication or surgery and feel that they are literally on their own; and from women who have experienced some of the most extreme physical symptoms and those whose mental health has really suffered, struggling in silence because that is what they thought they had to do and did not know what was happening to them.

In the public engagement survey earlier this year, Helen shared her story. She told us:

"My perimenopause symptoms started at 41....by the time I was 42, I had developed palpitations and anxiety attacks. I suddenly couldn't leave the house or meet people and was scared all the time that something was seriously wrong with my heart. I was a shell of the woman I used to be."

Then there are those who have taken the next step and visited their GP to ask for help, only to be turned away or sent packing with a prescription for antidepressants. I am not pointing the finger at GPs because I know how hard they work, but there is a woeful lack in their training and understanding of the menopause. Many are not able to join up the dots and women go undiagnosed.

In our survey, Catherine explained how she had experienced that exact problem. She said:

"With my own research I've had to work hard to convince my GP that constant increases and changes in antidepressants weren't working and my difficulties were hormonal. I nearly lost my job and my husband...it's taken 6 months to finally receive the HRT I need. Within 2 months of taking HRT I have successfully weaned off antidepressants, been able to start exercising and my home, work and personal life is"

completely "transformed".

It does feel like we are starting to turn a corner. If we can just bring all the pieces of the jigsaw together, we can change the future for ourselves, our daughters, for our daughters' daughters and for women who follow on

behind us forever more. We can stop menopause being something people are afraid to talk about. We can help to ensure that everyone understands the symptoms so that women know what is happening to them and family and friends are able to support them. We can make sure that women get the right diagnosis and the right treatment plan for them to help to alleviate their symptoms, and we can ensure that every workplace is a menopause-friendly workplace so that women can continue to succeed in their careers. It is time for change. It is time for the menopause revolution. Women want it, women need it, and women deserve it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am going to try to have this debate without putting a clock on. If people can show discipline and keep their speeches to about six minutes, we will get everybody in with an equal time.

3.46 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute to this debate to mark World Menopause Day earlier this week, and the whole of October being Menopause Awareness Month. The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) is absolutely bang on: this is not a political issue. I pay tribute to her tireless work, and it is a privilege to follow her excellent contribution. She and I have become something of a tag team on this issue, and it was notable that when we went to request that the Backbench Business Committee give time for the debate, we were quite definitely discussing when, not if.

In July, the Women and Equalities Committee launched our inquiry into menopause in the workplace, and since then we have collected evidence from a wide range of sources about the impact that menopause can have on women and work. However, before I highlight some of the issues that we have so far uncovered, I want to make a quick comment about the menopause and Westminster, or more specifically, the menopause and Whitehall.

Back in 2018, I had the privilege to be a member of the employment taskforce, and I have never forgotten the introduction given by one of the most senior civil servants in Whitehall to one of those meetings, where he spoke of the economy being "menopausal"—like it is some sort of insult, as if it is something to be ashamed of or ridiculed. I challenged him then in the same way that we must all challenge it now, because we have to beat down that stigma, that taboo, and make sure that the menopause is something that we can actually celebrate. I am talking about those brilliant menopausal women who have contributed so much during the course of their careers up to that point; the ones who are approaching the peak of their careers; the ones who have learned the ropes, gained the experience, given confidence to those following behind them and been role models to younger colleagues; the ones who have demonstrated that you can do it. If we allow menopause to be an insult, we are saying that the women who have achieved are suddenly of no use any more, and that is not the case.

But the workplace can be phenomenally difficult when experiencing menopausal symptoms. Goodness, anywhere can be difficult, but a recent survey carried out by the Fawcett Society on behalf of Standard Chartered and the Financial Services Skills Commission, specifically about women in finance who are experiencing

the menopause, highlighted some really stark findings. Over 50% of women are worried about taking on additional responsibilities because of the menopause—that is the promotion gone. Twenty-five per cent. of women considered leaving their career altogether because of the menopause—that is the job gone; that is the income gone.

We talk about 1 million women being lost to the workforce. Let that sink in: a million women. Those are experienced, talented, confident, knowledgeable women no longer playing a role in the boardroom and lost to the management tier—decades of experience and advice to younger colleagues simply gone. In stark economic terms, we cannot afford to let that happen. No business, no school, no fire service, no organisation, no Parliament can afford to lose its best and its most experienced.

The really scary thing about the evidence that my Committee has so far received is the number of requests for anonymity from women who want their evidence kept confidential because they are worried about its impact on their careers. That is not acceptable.

Yes, of course the menopause can be difficult. We will all have different symptoms at different times; some will be phenomenally lucky and have no symptoms at all, but some will have symptoms so severe that they cannot carry on at work. We have to break down the stigma and start the conversations so that I never again get an email like the one that I received from a company's HR director because she did not want her name attached to evidence to the Committee; she wanted it kept private because she was scared about what would happen to her career if anybody in her organisation even thought that she was menopausal.

I cannot predict where the evidence will take the Committee or what recommendations we might make to the Government. We have not even started taking oral evidence, so we are some way off my beating a path to the Minister's door, or to the door of Ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to ask for change.

I do not wish to make out that everything is negative. Far from it: the hon. Member for Swansea East gave some fabulous examples of companies that are real trailblazers. In our evidence-taking, I have been completely candid with employers and said, "I want to hear the good as well as the bad—I want to be able to celebrate you and hold you up as a role model to other companies and organisations."

We have already heard some of the names: Timpson, John Lewis, Tesco, PwC and all the companies that have signed the menopause workplace pledge organised by Wellbeing of Women and supported by Bupa. To all the companies and organisations such as the NAO, which invited me in to talk about the menopause as if I were some sort of expert—it should have had the hon. Lady, who is a far greater expert—I say thank you, because they are starting the conversations. They are just talking about it, and that is the first step.

Nowadays, I am pretty happy to talk to anybody about my menopause or perimenopause symptoms, whatever they are. My induction to that came from GB News, which bluntly came straight out with "What are your symptoms?" I had to give the answer, "I don't know"—I do not know whether the sweats at night are the start of the menopause or a result of my absolute addiction to a 13.5-tog duvet, which could explain it.

Even I balked at the prospect of using the term "vaginal dryness" in the presence of the Countess of Wessex; others were not quite so reticent.

I am conscious of time, but I want to mention briefly an individual champion. She is not quite my constituent—she is just over the border in North West Hampshire—but Claire Hattrick in Andover runs clipboardclaire.com, a blog dedicated to giving help and advice to other women. In the past week, she has published a whole book on the subject; she is coming to Parliament next week to support the hon. Member for Swansea East, give me a copy of her booklet and make sure that together we champion the brilliant advice out there for menopausal and perimenopausal women and spread the word.

We women born in the late 1960s and early 1970s are the ones most likely to be going through the perimenopause or menopause now. We are determined to speak up, speak out and find paths through the menopause that work for us. We will not be hiding away, because although we might be a pretty unlikely bunch of revolutionaries, it is a revolution that we need.

3.53 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for the opportunity to highlight World Menopause Month and the critical issues associated with menopause, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), for securing the debate. I will speak on one aspect of menopause: its link with osteoporosis. I do so as co-chair with Lord Black of Brentwood of the all-party parliamentary group on osteoporosis and bone health.

Menopause is an important time for bone health. When women reach the menopause, oestrogen levels decrease, which causes many women to develop symptoms such as hot flushes and sweats, as we have heard today. According to the Royal Osteoporosis Society, the decrease in oestrogen levels causes loss of bone density, so the menopause is an important cause of osteoporosis. Everyone loses bone density and strength as they get older, but women lose more bone density more rapidly in the years following the menopause, and they can lose up to 20% of their bone density during this time. With that loss of bone density comes reduced bone strength, and a greater risk of breaking bones.

Now for some facts about osteoporosis. Half all women and one in five men over 50 will break a bone as a result of poor bone health. As someone very wise put it to me yesterday, that is literally every other person. Osteoporosis causes more than half a million broken bones every year, which equates to almost one broken bone every minute. Breaking a bone usually means significant short-term pain and inconvenience, but it does not stop there. Many people with osteoporosis who break a bone live with long-term pain and disability, especially if their backs are affected. The reality of broken bones and the fear of falling have an impact on people's everyday lives and activities, preventing them from doing the things they love and, essentially, from being the people they are.

[Judith Cummins]

Yesterday was World Osteoporosis Day, and the Royal Osteoporosis Society marked the day by releasing findings from a new survey of over 3,000 people with osteoporosis, the 2021 “Life with osteoporosis” survey.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I am pleased to be a member of the all-party parliamentary group on menopause, led by my indefatigable hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). I am also pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) has raised the significant links between osteoporosis and the menopause. Does she agree that the four actions called for by the Royal Osteoporosis Society in its manifesto for a future without osteoporosis, including an expansion of the fracture liaison services, are not too much to ask for the 3.5 million people affected by the curse of osteoporosis?

Judith Cummins: I could not agree more wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Yesterday I had the honour of supporting the ROS, and a group of fantastic and passionate patient advocates who had helped with its report so enthusiastically, in delivering the report to the doorstep of No 10. Following that, we had a meeting with the Minister’s counterpart, the Minister for Care and Mental Health, the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who received the report on behalf of the Government. I hope that both Ministers, working together with us, will carefully consider the points raised in the report—alongside the ROS’s new policy manifesto, to which my hon. Friend just referred—and will make sure that the needs and wellbeing of all those with osteoporosis, as well as women as they approach and go through the menopause, are at the heart of the Government’s health policies.

I have visited my local fracture liaison service at Bradford Royal Infirmary. It is an excellent and award-winning service. I spent time with the team discussing how good their work was at a local level, and how we could make improvements at a national level. We discussed the inconsistencies in terms of delivery of treatment across the country to which my hon. Friend referred. But one of the astounding things that stood out was their pride, their enthusiasm and their dedication to providing such excellent treatment for the people of Bradford in respect of a disease which, although important, is rarely spoken about.

Significant harm could be prevented if we put prevention at the heart of primary care. Digital solutions which could support that already exist, but they are not properly integrated into IT systems in our GP surgeries. Such systems could easily identify people at risk of osteoporosis before that all-important first fracture. Those who experience early menopause—before the age of 45, and especially before the age of 40—are at particular risk of osteoporosis and fractures in later life. They are advised to take HRT at least up until the normal age of menopause, which is around the age of 50.

I am proud to stand here today to help break the silence of this silent disease, a disease that affects so many women—young women in today’s society; women who have much to offer, women who should not be left undiagnosed, women whose quality of life is left literally to crumble, women who are left to suffer in pain—when in fact this is a treatable condition, because our bones

are alive and can be built back stronger with the right treatment. I hope that the Minister will see why it is essential that, around the time of the menopause, women are properly supported to assess their risk of osteoporosis and fractures. I welcome her to her place, and I would also welcome any further conversations with her and her counterparts to ensure that we have the right policies in place to support women at this important time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Just to talk through the timings, the wind-ups will start no later than 4.36. There will be six minutes for Marion Fellows, eight minutes for the other two Front Benchers and the last two minutes for Carolyn Harris.

4 pm

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I should like to start by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate today. I also want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and of course my friend the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) not only for this debate but for their brilliant work on the menopause. The fact that we have a menopause awareness month, and a day, demonstrates how far we have come in this debate. Clearly there needs to be a continuous, bigger conversation on women’s health issues and about how our bodies change as we get older, and it is important to reinforce the fact that the Government have a clear policy on addressing women’s health. I look forward to the strategy being published—sooner rather than later, I hope.

As a perimenopausal woman myself—I say that with pride—I think it is right that we discuss these issues now, in public and with our friends and families. We have heard loud and clear today that access to information about the menopause remains critical to enabling women to feel empowered to make informed decisions about their own health. Right now, we need women themselves to be well informed, to have positive reinforcement and to be supported by sympathetic networks. That is why I am delighted to have met Elizabeth and Clare, the founders of Pausitivity, a not-for-profit campaign dedicated to helping women feel empowered to talk about the menopause and to provide tools to make informed decisions. I have a copy here of its “Know Your Menopause” poster. I have a copy in Welsh—Cymraeg—and one in English. It is also available in Urdu, Scottish Gaelic, German, French and Dutch on the campaign’s website. The posters follow the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines. I would recommend all clinical commissioning groups across the country to talk to their GPs about putting these posters up in their surgeries, to provide women with the information and signposting that they need.

I was first struck by the menopause—it was like being struck by a truck, to be honest—when I was 48. That was when I started to feel the many different symptoms. I had a blood test, but it showed that my hormones were fine. Apparently I was not having any issues with the menopause. I remember my GP phoning me about something and she said, “How are you?” I said, “Well, apart from the acne, the hair loss, the weight gain, the stress, the insomnia and the anxiety, I am absolutely fine!” To which she said, “Okay: HRT.” I went on to HRT straightaway and have never looked back. It has been a lifeline. I also have to declare an interest as I pay for the prescription charge myself.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I would like to commend the hon. Lady for her speech and to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for the excellent work that she has been doing. I also commend everybody in the Chamber this afternoon. I had a very similar experience to that of the hon. Lady at the age of 48 or 49. On the point about prescriptions, we are fortunate in Wales and I did not have to pay for my HRT prescriptions. I would like to give a shout-out to the Welsh Labour Government for looking after women in that way.

Nickie Aiken: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention.

I had a discussion with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care this week about the costs of HRT and the stresses and strains on the NHS budget following covid, which I understand. With this in mind, will the Minister reiterate to the House the current NICE guidelines and ask NICE to reach out to GPs and encourage them to tell their patients about all the options available to them, as well as any associated costs? I understand that there is a system in place where women can get an annual prescription for their HRT, but there is a lot of confusion about that, so I would appreciate it if the Minister could address that in her summing up.

As has already been said, and I completely agree, the menopause is not just a women's issue. This is a people's issue, and men have to be part of the discussion, too. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) and for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) for sitting down with me last week to ask about the menopause—my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes asked, “Will you please talk me through the menopause?” because he knows how important it is—and I gave them a complete and utter description. They were quite horrified, to be honest.

It goes back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) said: men have to understand what their mothers, sisters, partners and work colleagues are going through if we are ever to break down the barriers and make the menopause less of a taboo. I reiterated that to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care this week, and he agreed with me that men have a huge part to play in breaking down the barriers.

It is important that we consider the workplace. I take my hat off to the likes of Timpson and PwC for their brilliant work. Women, and particularly menopausal women, make up so much of the workforce. I am a woman in the prime of my life and hopefully just beginning my political career in this place. I believe I have so much to offer, and knowing that I have the HRT and the support will help me. We need to ensure that companies focus on developing strategies to help their women, and to help their colleagues to help women through this.

I am proud to support the Government's ambitious project to set women's health as a huge priority. We are making women's voices heard and putting them at the centre of their own care, to make sure that our national health system truly works for the whole nation. I believe the Minister is listening and I look forward to her response.

4.7 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken), who made some excellent

points, and it is great to take part in this debate on World Menopause Month. I am pleased to be a member of the all-party parliamentary group on menopause, chaired with typical passion and panache by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris).

I add my support to the call for the menopause revolution across policy making to finally address the personal, social and professional impact of the menopause on the lives of women in the UK. The issues faced by so many women were outlined so ably by my hon. Friend that I will not repeat them, but we will have another opportunity to discuss some of these issues next Friday when we consider her private Member's Bill. The menopause is an issue that has been woefully overlooked, and I particularly welcome her reference to menopause training, which is important.

As other Members want to speak, I will make a short contribution to add my support for the awareness raising and the calls for change. We need to see an urgent change of attitude in our workplaces to reflect the changing make-up of the workforce. Menopausal women are the fastest growing working demographic in the UK. In Wales, nearly half of all working women are over 50 and are likely to be experiencing the perimenopause or the menopause.

However, a cut-off age of 50 does not reflect the number of women affected, many of whom will be experiencing symptoms of the perimenopause in their mid-to-late 40s, while many younger women experience an early menopause, whether premature, surgical or medical. This includes younger women experiencing common conditions such as endometriosis, who may receive treatment that induces menopausal symptoms. I am sure we all pay tribute to the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis and its former chair, David Amess, who we are thinking about very much this week.

What is clear is that support for women suffering from the potentially debilitating symptoms of the menopause is not widespread in many workplaces. Although the Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, research from the Wales TUC, which has done great work on this for many years and I commend it to the Minister, highlights how many women feel that managers simply do not recognise problems associated with the menopause in the way that they would for other health conditions, even those with similar symptoms arising from different causes. In studies conducted ahead of the publication of its superb menopause toolkit, the Wales TUC found that almost a third of women with direct experience of the menopause felt that it was treated negatively in their workplace and nearly 60% reported witnessing the menopause being treated as a joke. That clearly highlights the pressing need for menopause workplace policies, particularly in large organisations, so that women know they have the support, the flexibility and the time off without the worry of losing out on pay.

I also want to mention the link between the menopause and osteoporosis, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) did. She is our lead on this, as chair of the all-party group on osteoporosis and bone health. That affects 3.5 million people across the UK. Half of women over 50 will suffer a broken bone due to osteoporosis, which, as she said, is a condition closely tied with changes in oestrogen levels. As she said, the menopause is an important time for

[*Jessica Morden*]

bone health and bone density. Like the menopause itself, osteoporosis is not something policy makers can merely dismiss as a mild feature of getting older, as many people die from fracture-related causes. Although people living with the disease can live a healthy life with prompt diagnosis and the right support, millions are suffering the consequences of long-term pain and even disability because of under-diagnosis and under-treatment.

The day-to-day impact of osteoporosis cannot be underestimated. Research from the Royal Osteoporosis Society shows that a quarter of osteoporosis sufferers will be living with long-term pain; that 71% have trouble with cleaning and cooking; and that 52% say the condition affects their ability to get around, to drive or to use public transport. There is much more on that. Work is going on in many areas, including in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in my area, where we have the specialist first fracture clinic in Pontypool, and a fracture liaison service based at Nevill Hall Hospital. However, that needs to be more widespread. I implore Ministers to work with the ROS on its request for the Government to match-fund their research investment, as part of a much-needed rebalancing of research investment towards musculoskeletal conditions, which account for 9% of the health burden, but a mere 3% of the research spend.

Finally, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East for her Menopause (Support and Services) Bill to end English prescription charges for hormone replacement therapy, which can help to prevent osteoporosis and other menopause symptoms. As has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), thanks to the Welsh Labour Government, our constituents in Wales do not have to pay to access that essential treatment. The Bill aims to ensure that that is also true for our neighbours across the River Severn.

4.13 pm

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this debate and on her words earlier, because this is an important debate on an important issue. I mean no disrespect to any of the male Members here, because I know they are champions as well, but I have a suspicion that, if this was a male issue, it may have been discussed and medicated out of existence by now.

I had a career in my 20s and 30s, as many of us did. I took a career break for 16 years and when I came back I realised why women in their 50s sometimes do not start new careers—I will leave it at that and not go into any more detail—although I highly recommend that they do.

I wish to make one point about access to HRT for those of us who have a family history of breast cancer, and how difficult—in my case, nigh on impossible—that has been. There is an issue about the training of GPs, misinformation about the issue, and surveys and research that may be out of date. It is so important that diagnosis, treatments and information are based on the latest research and data, and are proportionate. Other issues, including osteoporosis, are important counterbalances to the risk of breast cancer.

One of the biggest things this Government are doing is the women's health strategy. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), who was previously the Minister responsible, for her work on the strategy, which I know the new Minister will continue. Women's health, physiology and biology have not always been taken as a central point of reference for medicine, diagnosis and the way we devise and deliver health services in this country. Making sure that that changes is a crucial part of our work in this House.

I wish to make one final point. A few years ago, probably around the time of World Menopause Month, a prominent female parliamentarian with many years of experience used social media to say to women, "Recognise the symptoms and get treatment, help and advice." The first response was from someone who said that she should not use the term menopause because it was not inclusive enough. If we have a problem, we have to name it and understand it and who it affects. We should be clear that biological sex is a reality and that this affects women, along with lots of other things. To recognise it, treat it and talk about it, we have to be very clear about that biological fact.

4.16 pm

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), but I remind the House that when it comes to medical conditions, inclusive language matters, and although the menopause does impact women, it also impacts trans men and nonbinary people. It is important that that is reflected in language so that they get accurate healthcare.

Like so many colleagues in the House, I am delighted that the Backbench Business Committee has granted time today for us to debate this important issue. I am especially grateful to my fantastic friends, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who are both leading the way when it comes to improving the discourse on menopause. It is a credit to their tireless campaigning that we have now reached this point and are able to speak openly about the need for greater Government action and support; for improved education in GP surgeries, the workplace and schools; and ultimately to work together to remove the stigma that surrounds the menopause.

I am pleased to see so many Members and friends from all parties participating in this debate, and I am particularly grateful to and inspired by those who have shared their personal experiences with the menopause. We must be mindful that the menopause impacts a huge range of people, as I said, and is no longer just an issue that impacts those over a certain age. When I was undergoing fertility treatment, I experienced a kind of early menopause as a consequence of the hormones and medication that the treatment required, and it truly knocked me for six. I experienced it all: from the hot flushes and headaches to fatigue and terrible concentration. It truly made me appreciate what my own mam, and so many others before me, have been through, and it opened my eyes to the impact that the menopause can have on everyday lives.

I join colleagues in raising the fantastic Pausitivity campaign and the vital resources that its team provides. Everyone who has experienced menopausal symptoms,

whether medically induced or as part of the ageing process, will have different gripes, but it is vital that we start speaking up at every opportunity to make others who may not experience the menopause more aware. Indeed, as colleagues have said, we now know that around one in 100 women in the UK will experience menopausal symptoms before they turn 40, and it is estimated that in total around 13 million women in the UK are currently perimenopausal or menopausal. It is a completely normal part of life for some but, sadly, many women feel a huge amount of stigma and experience difficulty in talking about and dealing with the symptoms.

But there is hope. Alongside the Pausitivity campaign, my union, Unison, has a fantastic menopause-awareness campaign that I am a long-time supporter of. From my own experiences, I know at first hand just how important flexible working patterns are when going through the menopause. Simple changes such as paid leave and temperature controls in the workplace can have such a major impact on women who are experiencing menopausal symptoms. We now know that around eight out of 10 menopausal women are in work, so a significant proportion of the population is being impacted.

Despite the challenges that we still face, I am proud that a number of businesses are leading the way in creating real change in how women are facing the menopause and how they are treated in the workplace. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East has already mentioned, only this week the fantastic James Timpson, the chief executive of the Timpson Group, has announced that all colleagues will be able to claim on expenses their prescription costs when they are recommended HRT. This is a small step, but I know that it will help so many.

As colleagues will also be aware, earlier this month, fashion giant ASOS began to offer staff flexible work and paid leave during the menopause. This comes alongside several new policies that the company has announced, including paid leave for staff who have experienced a pregnancy loss or are undergoing fertility treatment, with five days paid leave provided per cycle to ensure that appointments can be attended and their work will not suffer. This is fantastic progress and it must now be backed up by legislation, urging other companies to follow suit. I therefore urge the Minister to please work with her colleagues in Government to bring forward this much-needed legislation that will finally protect women in the workplace who are experiencing the menopause, baby loss or infertility.

It is clear from the popularity of today's debate and the widespread nature of the contributions that the menopause is far from a niche issue. It does not take a genius to work out that it will affect about half of us in our lifetimes. I sincerely hope that the Government are listening and are finally ready to take this issue seriously both for women suffering now, and for those of future generations, too.

4.20 pm

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): Periods, labour, childbirth, breast feeding and the menopause—oh, mother nature, please give us a break. Today, we are talking specifically about the menopause. Here we go again: migraines, insomnia, anxiety, aching joints, confidence dips, brain fog, tiredness, flushes, irritation, tears and

AC-130—Members may ask what that is. It is fair to say that they will get the picture when I say that my ex-ex-boyfriend described me at one point as being similar to an AC-130, the world's biggest flying artillery gunship nicknamed "Hell in the Sky", with three side firing weapons, a 25 mm Gatling gun, a 40mm Bofors cannon, and a 105 mm howitzer firing on all sides. We are talking about the joys of menopausal rage. Members will be pleased to know that the AC-130, so described, was only temporarily in action and was retired some time ago, as was the ex-ex-boyfriend.

Seriously, I do not want to be here talking about this today. I do not like baring my soul about something so deeply personal, let alone here in this great place. This is the only time, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I wish there was a time limit. The taboo around the subject is evident when we consider who is, or who is not, sitting in this Chamber. It is a shame that there are not more people of all ages in here contributing to the debate. Clearly, speaking in this debate is what I needed to do to give women hope that, while this is a club that no one wants to join, ultimately we all do—as a woman. But you know what? Once in, it is a lovely club with some amazing and awesome women.

I thank the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) for ensuring that we actually had this debate and that I actually came here and spoke out. I came through all of this very early and unscathed. However, I do wish to raise the issue of bone density, which the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) mentioned. Unbelievably, I did not realise what was happening at first—it was some years ago now—but I do now in hindsight. The horror was to do with my bone density. I did not have HRT at the time, so there was a sudden rush to put me on it once we realised that I had practically gone through the menopause. I had a bone density scan and everything was tickety-boo in that area—thank the Lord for that.

Talking about the menopause is a big deal for women. It is for me. I feel that we often have to defend ourselves. We are very much judged on it and women are embarrassed about it, as am I. It is often not talked about, even between women. We just do not want to talk about it. Men are embarrassed about it, too. As I was leaving for this debate, I was speaking to one of the guys in the flat. I told him that I was just about to go and talk in a menopause debate. He said, "Oh, all right. We can't talk about that, so good luck." Young women just see something that they think is unique to their mothers and that will not ever happen to them, but, trust me, it actually will and they will certainly know about it when it does happen. Look we must talk about it. We have to educate those who sadly believe that a women's identity is built only on biological fertility and educate those who think that being menopausal indicates that a woman's sell-by date has well and truly expired. Well, to whoever said any of the above or thinks it: just look at the amazing number of women sitting on these Benches who entered politics at their supposed sell-by date. We must talk about this so that it is no longer a taboo. And please—so I do not have to stand here talking about it ever again—can we just get it out there? Of course, also for the partners, colleagues and employers of menopausal women, we must share and understand the physical and mental impacts that the menopause can have on women.

[Suzanne Webb]

The menopause is an entirely natural biological process. I thank the Government for putting it on the agenda. If I remember rightly, it was my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) who started to do so. The Government are in the process of developing a women's health strategy, which will look to tackle menopause education. I have long thought that we needed to do more in schools to normalise hormones. From September 2020, relationships and sex education and health education have been compulsory in all state-funded schools. As part of this, pupils are taught about menstrual health and the menopause. A positive attitude to hormones is crucial and much needed, with more education in schools to break the myth that women are only defined by and are relevant through their biological fertility.

Society needs to reframe its attitude. It is okay to be grumpy. Tears are okay. Hot flushes are okay. Hot necks are okay. Layering clothes is the new "en vogue" for any perimenopausal woman, who can go from ambient temperature to extreme heat in the blink of an eye. The coldness in this Chamber is actually so welcome for anyone who is perimenopausal—so I thank the House! Some women fly through the menopause, some deny it and others suffer symptoms that affect their family and professional lives, and they deserve empathy, support and practical solutions.

Let me touch on HRT. As I said, I did end up having some HRT towards the end of that time, but it did not work for me. I think it is important to say that it does not always work for everybody, and it is important for people to have the right conversations with their doctor and to share that experience. If people start to feel other symptoms, as I did, they must go back to their doctor to have that conversation.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend makes an important point about HRT not working for everyone. What is also true is that different types of HRT work differently. Of course, the issue of prescription costs comes in for people who have to try several versions.

Suzanne Webb: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. That is exactly what happened with me. We went through the process and tried the various options, although I ultimately ended up coming off HRT because it just did not suit me.

Talking about menopause is so important, especially when we often do not realise that we are starting to go through the process. We are not tapped on the shoulder one day and told, "This is it." It is a slow and confusing process that can create anxiety and depression. Some say that it can be akin to a grieving process. The menopause brings on deep and profound changes, which should not be underestimated, but somewhat embraced, and perimenopausal women should not be confined to the out-of-date shelf. It is for all of us to think about this issue and do something about it; we all need to do something about this.

4.28 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on her contribution. I cannot think of any debate that we have

not been together on. Indeed, the hon. Lady usually puts forward her suggestion of what she wants me to do and I easily fall in with whatever she says. She is infectious; she makes others want to be part of the debate and enthuses them.

As a man, I am pleased to speak in this debate because, as other Members have said, it is important that we understand the issues. I am pleased to be part of the growing call to bring living through menopause out of the shadows and into mainstream life. Some cynics might wonder what gives me the authority to speak when I do not have the necessary equipment to understand fully. I acknowledge that, because, in much the same way, unless someone is a diabetic, as I am, they can never fully grasp the life-impacting changes that diabetes brings. Although I cannot bring first-hand experience to this issue, I believe that I can bring compassion and a desire for other men to understand that we have a role to play in the cycle of menopause about which each and every person who has spoken today has referred.

I was recently asked to make comment on the menopause for a blog. The hon. Member for Swansea East had made the bloggers aware that I would be very keen to do so, and I did, of course, as she knows. I said that I was raised by a very strong lady in my mother, who gave me a real appreciation for the work ethic with the kind and no-nonsense approach of a good woman. Sandra and I have been married for some 34 years. Some people may say, "How has she stuck it that length of time?" Well, there must be something right, otherwise we would not be together, let us put it that way. She raised our three boys. She volunteered in the local charity. She kept our home going while I worked incredibly long hours. I am so grateful for her support in every aspect of my life.

However, as Sandra has approached menopause, it is clear that while she can and does continue to bear the load of minding the grandchildren and all those other responsibilities, she does need my support, and others' as well. It has been hard for me to understand as I have watched her go through all these changes. I have learned that I do not need to understand but I simply need to be there, and she needs to know that I am not there expecting her to facilitate my normal standard of life, but rather there for her. I came home one day and she said to me, "Oh, I heard you were on 'Loose Women' today." Right away, I felt the cold sweat on my brow and my heart missed a beat, and then I realised that it was because the hon. Member for Swansea East was asked on that programme whether there were any men who were supporting her, and she referred to me. My wife was then greatly encouraged when she realised that I was supportive of this.

I joined the APPG to highlight the fact that menopause is not an experience that a woman must suffer through alone; it is an experience in which we can all stand together as she comes through what can be a very difficult time in her life. It is an experience that men must better understand to provide the help and support that will change the experience. It is an experience that is a certainty of life for most ladies, but women do not have to walk alone. That is why on this World Menopause Day I am proud say that I stand alongside my wife, Sandra, my mother and indeed every other woman to offer my support and encourage other men to understand that we can make a difference and be a help. That is our role—to help.

I commend the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) for the work that she does on osteoporosis. A prolonged lack of oestrogen affects the bones and the cardiovascular system, leaving those who are post-menopausal at increased risk of a number of long-term conditions such as osteoporosis. Women's Health Concern, the patient arm of the British Menopause Society, emphasises that, unlike hot flushes—it is important for the Minister to address this when she responds—there are often no obvious symptoms of osteoporosis and the first sign is usually the fracture of a bone. The hon. Lady illustrated that only too well.

Osteoporosis makes bones fragile, which causes painful and disabling fractures. Women aged over 45 years spend more days in hospital due to osteoporosis than diabetes, heart attack or breast cancer, and osteoporotic or fragility fractures can have a profound impact on everyday life, causing loss of independence, misery and death. A post-menopausal woman has a 50% chance of sustaining an osteoporosis-related fracture in her lifetime. Once a fragility fracture has occurred, the risk of future fractures at least doubles. In women over 50 years of age, the lifetime risk of a vertebral fracture is one in three and is one in five for a hip fracture. The link is clear. I commend the hon. Lady, and others as well, for outlining that. I congratulate the International Menopause Society on highlighting this issue as a real and present danger that occurs after menopause.

I end with a further plea to all the men who are in this House and all the men who are watching on the screens outside: do not be embarrassed but be involved. Help your partner. Be informed about what your partner is going through and be part of the process and a help. I know what it is to feel helpless, and sometimes even clueless, as I am often reminded in my home by my good lady, but I have learned the truth of the scripture: two are better than one, for if one falls, the other is there to help them up. I may not have the right words—I often do not; although I have lots of words, I often maybe do not have the right ones—but kindness and understanding is worth more than an encyclopaedia. I encourage families to be involved and be of use.

Eighty per cent. of women suffer from menopausal symptoms; 100% of women deserve support. That is what we are calling for today—support from Government, support from employers, and support in families. I commend the hon. Member for Swansea East, and the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) as well, for putting forward this case. I hope that, as a man, I have made a worthwhile contribution.

4.34 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): How do you follow that? I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I was looking around the Chamber before I started thinking about what I would say, and I think I am probably the oldest woman here who has gone through the menopause. It must have been 15, 20 years ago. You can ask my children or, if you could, my late husband, and they would tell you. It is absolutely wonderful that we can have this debate today. I am someone who started to squirm when they showed sanitary products in adverts on telly a few years ago. In my lifetime, growing up and becoming a woman and having children, none of this was ever discussed. I am of the Cissie and Ada generation, with Les Dawson—

I cannot do the impression—but that is how everyone did not speak about the menopause. This debate is refreshing, important and, beyond everything, it lets people outside this Chamber see that there are issues we can come together on—men and women, and different parties.

I will rush through my speech now. This debate has been great. I will not list everyone who has spoken, but many important issues have been raised. I want to give some hope to people. The Scottish Government have a women's health plan, which we are pressing forward with. There might be ideas there that the Minister can take forward, and I urge her to do that. I am not saying this as anything other than help. We have all these different things such as, through NHS Education for Scotland, the training of GPs, frontline providers and everyone else to do the kinds of things that make doctors think about menopause when women turn up to their surgeries and other places. It is important. We have a menopause specialists network, and that helps move things forward. The SNP Scottish Government want all women to have access to proper, high-quality and appropriate information and support, and they will shortly be starting on a campaign to make people more aware of menopause and menopausal symptoms.

As most Members will know, we do not pay prescription charges in Scotland, and that helps a lot of women. It makes it easier for people to go to their doctor, knowing that they can get treatment that is paid for by way of prescription. That encourages people to do things.

The menopause, as we have heard this afternoon, has a serious physical and psychological impact on women, from memory loss to pain, and it has to be taken seriously by health professionals and society more widely. More support in the workplace is particularly needed. We have had examples of good companies this afternoon, but that is not the point; it has to be across the board. We have to get all organisations and companies to understand what is needed.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government use their fair work policy to promote fairer work practices. They work with women's organisations and trade unions to improve workplace equality and push for the full devolution of employment powers. However, I make an appeal to the UK Government. They must stop delaying and move forward with their long-awaited Employment Bill, including a day one right to request flexible working, as has been mentioned. That would begin to address the pressing issue of workplace inequality, which has only been worsened by the pandemic.

It is essential that women have access to the right support and are met with understanding in the workplace when managing menopausal symptoms. I was lucky. I had a room full of students, and if I said, "Is it hot in here?", and they all went, "No, Marion", I said, "I don't care. I'm opening every window", and they sat and froze through the rest of their lecture. I am not saying that everyone should do that, but I do say that dealing with this issue is important, because we could lose the best of the workforce with so many women who are going or will go through it.

There is an obvious and huge need to improve healthcare for women and to tackle the stigma around women's health that still exists. World Menopause Month is a welcome opportunity to break down that stigma and to push for greater action to tackle health inequalities

[*Marion Fellows*]

that have an impact on women's day-to-day lives. I will write to the Minister with more detail about what we are doing in Scotland if she would be willing to receive that.

4.40 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I am proud of everyone who has spoken today. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for all her work on this important topic. She never ceases to amaze me with her tireless campaigning, which has earned her a formidable reputation across all our nations. Many issues divide us in this place, but we have seen the best of the House in this debate. We are here only because of the work of fantastic campaigners. In a short time, we have moved from hearing whispers of "the change" in people's living rooms to addressing what real change is needed to support women. We are doing that here in such an important way.

It is only possible to reduce the stigma around the menopause by talking and listening as we have today. I thank all hon. Members who have contributed—men and women—on both sides, because they and their solidarity matter. Along with the many accounts we have heard, it has been incredibly important to read accounts of high-profile women realising that they are experiencing the menopause.

We have heard a heady mix of humour and heartfelt tributes today, but it is a daunting space to navigate. As a woman who has not yet entered the menopausal phase of her life, but who has been through starting a period, worrying about having children, having children and understanding her body, after today's debate I feel less anxious than ever about a topic that many women find extremely worrying to talk about. We have celebrities to thank for raising awareness.

How many of us have never had those much-needed conversations with our families? For how many of us is it too taboo to even start discussing our periods, let alone have conversations about the menopause? It is damaging to our society that far too many women simply do not know what to look out for. More and more women are learning about the menopause from celebrity accounts. There is still far too much mystery around our bodies, despite making up 51% of the population, and that simply has to change.

It is our duty to tackle the misinformation about the menopause and HRT. I hope that this debate goes some way to addressing some of those myths. Better information about the menopause and HRT would likely mean that more women would receive treatment before their symptoms became debilitating. For example, we have heard about osteoporosis, as well as moving accounts of people living with serious mental illness and wondering why they do not feel like themselves. For many women, that lasts more than a decade.

It is important that we recognise GPs' essential work and pay due thanks for it, but it is also important to address the lack of understanding that some GPs demonstrate. I have heard accounts of GPs refusing to diagnose women as menopausal, resulting in a frustratingly long drawn-out process that has led far too many women to give up and suffer in silence.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making excellent points. I first encountered the issue as a young woman writing a draft women's strategy for a regional health authority in 1989, in which it did not feature. We hear much about strategies and the education of medics, but actually they have not transformed and changed in that time. Does she agree that they are important?

Evidence shows that osteoporosis disproportionately affects women with lower incomes and that there is huge variability of services across the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that that also needs to be addressed?

Dr Allin-Khan: I wholeheartedly agree with both of my hon. Friend's points. In fact, we have heard today the statistics about just how much there is a lack of education about the menopause in medical school. It was something that we did not really talk very much about when I was at medical school. It is also really important to highlight the fact that we live in a very diverse country and a diverse society, where information has to be available in a number of languages and where there has to be proper outreach to communities in which people certainly would not think of speaking about it at home.

As I have touched on, the effect that the menopause can have on women's mental health must not be ignored. It should not be underestimated. How many of us throughout our lives have been dismissed as hormonal, hysterical even, or too emotional? The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb) spoke about her ex-ex, and I am glad to hear he is such, but unfortunately we do get labelled—women get labelled—as hysterical or hormonal as an excuse. I have actually experienced it at first hand right here at the Dispatch Box. Is it any wonder then that women are scared to speak about what is happening to their bodies?

Women who experience mood changes during menopause are often not taken seriously. The symptoms of mental ill health are often condescendingly brushed aside as simple mood swings or unnecessary aggression as a result of the menopause. The reinforcement of women as hysterical or highly emotional is incredibly damaging. No wonder some women feel they are unable to reach out for support. So many hon. Members have mentioned, so importantly, the workplace, and for so many women, support simply is not available. They are often forced to suffer in silence for fear of repercussions. This is at a time when women should be reaching their professional peaks in their careers—the heady heights of what it means to be a CEO, run a hospital, run a business or sit here in Parliament—but, instead, women are forced to make up excuses about why they are taking days off or feel that they have to take early retirement. Well, this has to end, because women are a powerful force and able to achieve anything at any point in their life, and it has been wonderful to have reminders of that today.

Besides a seismic change in attitude and an eradication of stigma, what action do we need to ensure real change to support women undergoing the menopause? We need menopause awareness training for employers to help reduce stigma and to ensure that women are getting appropriate support and advice. This not only benefits those with menopausal symptoms, but has economic benefits for employers and wider society by helping to

improve productivity and reduce absenteeism. We need to ensure that medical professionals are able to recognise when women are menopausal so that HRT can be prescribed, eradicating the lengthy waits, and women must be able to access accurate information on menopause to dispel the myths once and for all.

I would like to end by again thanking every Member for their contribution today, and I eagerly await to hear from the Minister how the Government plan to tackle the stigma surrounding menopause and offer real support for women once and for all.

4.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): How amazing it is that, at last, women's issues and the menopause are finally getting the coverage they deserve. I want to start by paying tribute to Sir David Amess, who was such a long-standing campaigner on women's health issues, particularly endometriosis. I feel sure he would have been with us here this afternoon, standing in solidarity on this very issue.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)—a woman not to be messed with, quite frankly—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) for, and congratulate them on, securing this debate. I also thank them for their work on the all-party parliamentary group and on the Women and Equalities Committee, including for the launch of the inquiry that the Committee is about to undertake. For too long, the menopause has been a grubby little secret for women. It is often just called “the change” because women are just not confident enough even to call it the menopause.

I also want to thank all the Members across the House, and particularly the men, actually, for taking part—the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), the hon. Members for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), my hon. Friends the Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken) and for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I completely agree with the hon. Member for Swansea East that this is not a political issue; this is something on which we need to be working cross-party, and I am confident we can make some serious progress on it.

It is so important that we raise awareness of these important issues and, in doing so, play our part in ending the taboo and stigma that surrounds the menopause. As a fellow member of the menopausal club, what frightens me is that most women are unaware that they are actually going through the menopause. We are talking about women in their 40s and 50s, which is a very busy time in their lives—they are often looking after children and have heavy work responsibilities, and maybe responsibilities for elderly parents—who suddenly feel that they cannot cope, are exhausted and are failing, but simply do not realise that they are going through a natural ageing process. A lot of women assume that the menopause is just hot flushes and their periods stop. They do not realise that it is about brain fog, low mood,

weight gain, headaches, or not being able to sleep. It is a lightbulb moment when they realise that they are going through the menopause.

There are more than 30 symptoms of the menopause. Some women will experience some, some will experience all, and some will experience debilitating symptoms that completely transform their life. With around 400,000 women entering the menopause each year, access to high quality healthcare support is essential. All women going through the menopause should be able to have conversations with healthcare practitioners, whether that is a practice nurse, their GP, a councillor or a pharmacist. Guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on diagnosing and managing the menopause state that an individualised approach should be adopted at all stages, including diagnosis, investigation, and management of the menopause. I confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster that NICE guidelines state that after three months of taking HRT, it is recommended that GPs prescribe it for women annually, although we know that in practice, that does not always happen.

The guidelines outline the information that menopausal women should be given by clinicians to support the management of symptoms, and they include guidance on HRT, non-hormonal treatment and non-pharmaceutical approaches. They recommend that HRT is appropriate for most women, but unfortunately we find that levels of prescribing are relatively low, and only a minority of women currently get access to it. That is mainly based on flawed research from about a decade ago, which raised concerns for both women and healthcare practitioners, who are not necessarily confident in prescribing HRT. It is so important that work is undertaken with stakeholders to develop and implement optimal care pathways for women.

Let me touch on some of the issues raised in the debate, particularly about the workplace. I know that the Women and Equalities Committee will soon undertake its inquiry, and I am keen to work with it on that and see its findings. With one in four women in the workplace being either menopausal or post-menopausal, it is important that employers play their part. Companies such as Channel 4, Asos, Vodafone, HSBC and many others mentioned today are doing tremendous work. The NHS workforce is 77% female, and it is working to develop a menopause workplace support package, which will be pioneered in the NHS through local health systems. Some green shoots of progress are being made, but there is a huge amount more to be done and the Government are considering how we can influence that debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North spoke about this issue, and I am keen to work with her and her Committee to make progress on that. We have mentioned the women's healthcare strategy, and I am pleased that the Government launched a consultation on that in March this year. This is the establishment of England's first ever women's healthcare strategy, and the response was huge. In the call for evidence, more than 110,000 responses were given to the online survey, and more than 500 organisations provided written submissions. For women aged 40 to 49 and 50 to 59, the menopause was the No. 1 issue that they wanted the women's health strategy to cover. I am pleased to announce today that the menopause will be a priority when we publish the women's health strategy in the coming months.

[*Maria Caulfield*]

The lesson from today is that we do not need just to talk about the menopause; we need to act and support women through it, whether in the workplace or by supporting them to get access to the treatment they need. This is about raising awareness among women themselves, so that they know they are going through the menopause, but also to get better recognition of it in society as a whole. We do not talk enough about how the menopause affects women. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) contacted me to tell me that they are not just talking about the menopause in Eastbourne; they are singing about it, too, with the theatre running “Menopause the Musical”. It is up in lights down in Eastbourne if anyone wants to attend.

The hon. Member for Swansea East is completely right: we need to do much more than talk about this issue. We will have another opportunity to continue the debate next Friday, and I will talk to her between now and then to see what progress we can make. As we have heard today, the damaging taboos—the stigmas—that prevent women from speaking about their experience need to change. It is difficult to access support at the moment, and we need to do something about it.

As the Minister responsible for women’s health, I am committed to supporting women through the menopause to reach their potential and live healthier and happier lives, and I am convinced that we can make progress. Maybe a revolution is about to happen. I believe that we are about to see a seismic change in the way society and healthcare systems understand and support women experiencing the menopause.

4.55 pm

Carolyn Harris: I hope that colleagues truly appreciate the impact that us in this place talking about this subject has on those watching and listening. I have lost

count of the people who have contacted me and thanked me for raising the issue. The emotion and gratitude from those women, who finally feel that they have a voice, is truly overwhelming. But Parliament is not just being watched today by the women out there; we are being watched on the global stage. Me on the global stage—terrifying, isn’t it? But I am absolutely loving the fact that I have legislators, press, medical professionals and academics from right across the world saying, “You were talking about something in the UK Parliament; we want to learn from you.” We will be world leaders on this.

We have warriors such as Davina McCall, Louise Newson, Penny Lancaster, Louise Minchin, Lisa Snowdon, Gabby Logan, Nadia Sawalha, Mariella Frostrup and Kate Muir—prominent women in the media who are telling their story—as well as the Countess of Wessex and so many more voices. Everyone in this place brave enough to embrace talking about the menopause is a menopause warrior and is playing a huge role in allowing women to be fabulous all their lives. So, words I never thought we would say in the House of Commons Chamber—long live the revolution!

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): They don’t come more fabulous than you, Carolyn.

Congratulations to everyone on taking part in the debate. I am really pleased that Sir David Amess was mentioned today. I am absolutely certain that, had the tragedy not happened, he would have been here today cheering you all on.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered World Menopause Month.

Black History Month

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Scott Mann.*)

4.58 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I thank Mr Speaker for selecting this important Adjournment debate and ensuring that we can once again debate Black History Month during the month of October.

Last year, through the Backbench Business Committee, I held the first Black History Month debate in the Chamber in five years. It was an extremely well attended debate with many good contributions from across the Chamber. I am pleased that we are able to debate this topic again. I am sorry that fewer colleagues will be able to take part, although my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) is holding a Backbench Business debate in Westminster Hall next week.

Black History Month is an extremely important annual event, but I strongly believe that we should be talking about black history week in, week out rather than just once a year. The theme of this year's Black History Month is "Proud to be", and I would like to begin my speech, as I did last year, by highlighting and celebrating a number of black Britons who have been under-appreciated and under-recognised in our national discourse. These black Britons are great Britons, and we should celebrate them as such. I again pay tribute to Akyaba Addai-Sebo, co-ordinator of special projects for the Greater London Council, who organised the first recognition of this month in 1987.

This year, we have seen outstanding campaigning by Marcus Rashford, who has done so much to help children living in poverty. However, I also want to mention another footballer, Jack Leslie, who played for Plymouth Argyle in the 1920s. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) recently told me the story of Jack Leslie, who would, in 1925, have been the first black player in the England team, except that his name was withdrawn from selection because of the colour of his skin. It was not until 1978 that the first black player finally joined the national team. There is now an excellent campaign for a statue to be erected in Jack's honour in Plymouth.

Mary Prince was the first woman to present an anti-slavery petition to Parliament and the first black woman to write and publish an autobiography. I understand that there is a petition proposing to replace the statue outside the Museum of London Docklands with a statue of her.

At this point, I commend the Mayor of London and the Black Cultural Archives for producing the black history tube map, celebrating the rich and varied contribution black people have made to London and the UK from Tudor times to the present day. I strongly encourage people to look up their local black heroes.

I congratulate my friend Lord Simon Woolley on becoming the first black man to lead an Oxbridge college. He is a trailblazer. I also must not forget to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the first black woman elected to Parliament, who has been a trailblazer for many black MPs in Parliament.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing forward this debate on a really important issue. I am here to support her for that purpose. History should be rich and we should ensure that British history is taught in schools. Does she agree that the curriculum should have time factored in each year for local history, to help children to learn the history of local communities—she has just referred to that—across the whole of the United Kingdom and the immense contribution of black history, heritage and culture to this nation?

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank the hon. Member for mentioning that point. I completely support that and I will talk about it in detail later in my speech. It is important to know about local history.

I want to celebrate constituents such as Melrose, a nurse at Greenwich and Bexley community hospice, who said:

"Every day we"—
as black nurses—

"go to work. We take our roles seriously. However, we are confronted on a regular basis by people who don't appreciate us because of who we are: our cultural identity is either mocked or discarded rather than accepted. We strive through hundreds of hurdles, we skip, we jump, we swim and we keep smiling. We learn, we grow and we move forward a few steps down the line and we bounce back. We are resilient."

Melrose's testimony reminds me of the great sacrifices many black people have made over the past years in response to the covid pandemic.

Another constituent, Florence Emakpose, part of the World of Hope organisation in Abbey Wood, worked throughout the lockdown to reach out to vulnerable families with their own food bank service.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): If we are talking about black heroes and heroines, who could be more heroic than that generation of black nurses from all over the Commonwealth who helped to build the NHS post war, the NHS of which we are all so proud today?

Abena Oppong-Asare: I am delighted my right hon. Friend has mentioned that point. It is something I am particularly passionate about as our family worked in the NHS. I am concerned about the Windrush generation, for whom the Government, I have to say, have yet to provide adequate support. I hope the Minister will be able to highlight what support he will be giving to that generation, who contributed so much to the NHS, as my right hon. Friend says.

I also want to mention Lara Alabi, based in Thamesmead, who won a community award for setting up Seniors in Touch, a weekly club for over-50s in Thamesmead, to tackle isolation issues relating to health and lack of confidence.

As well as paying tribute to under-acknowledged black Britons, I want to use this debate to highlight some of the inequalities that continue to affect black people in this country and that I believe the Government must do more to address. The first is black maternity health. There have been two important Westminster Hall debates on this issue over the last year and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) for leading them. I also pay tribute

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

to the group Five X More, which has done so much to bring the issue up the political agenda. It has highlighted the stark disparity in outcomes that black women face when giving birth in this country.

Black women are four times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth. Black women are up to 83% more likely to suffer a near miss during pregnancy. Black babies have a 121% increased risk of stillbirth and a 50% risk of neonatal death. Miscarriage rates are 40% higher in black women, and black ethnicity is regarded as a risk factor for miscarriage. Put simply, giving birth as a black woman is considerably riskier than for women of other ethnicities. The Government know that this inequality exists and now is the time for action.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): My hon. Friend has highlighted well the statistics and she will be aware that the Government still have no target to end this. Does she agree that the fact that the Government have decided not to set a target and not to look at institutional racism in the NHS goes no way to solving the issues that she so eloquently raised?

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank my hon. Friend for the work that she has done on this issue. That is completely accurate.

We need a target to end racial maternal health inequalities and an action plan to achieve it. The plan should include action to improve data collection, to improve the support for at-risk women, to implement the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Human Rights' report on this issue and to identify the barriers to accessing maternal mental health services. But most of all, I urge the Government to listen to the experiences of black women, to engage with them directly, to hear their concerns and to take them seriously.

I turn to another issue that affects black women and girls: the lack of specialist training for police and other agencies supporting black women who are victims of domestic abuse. Here, I pay tribute to the organisation *Sistah Space*, a domestic abuse charity supporting women of African and Caribbean heritage. I met its representatives recently to discuss their petition to introduce Valerie's law. That is named in memory of Valerie Forde, who was murdered by her former partner in 2014 alongside their 22-month-old daughter. She had previously asked the police for help after her ex-partner had threatened to burn down her house with her in it, but this was recorded only as a threat to her property.

While that story is shocking, it is sadly not uncommon. Too many black women do not get the support that they need because the police are not trained to spot and deal appropriately with domestic violence in black communities. That includes things such as missing signs of domestic violence on black skin and a lack of cultural knowledge about how threats can be communicated. We need mandatory, specialist training for the police and others on all of this and more. I hope that the Government will seriously consider that as part of the renewed focus on violence against women and girls, given recent events.

I now wish to return to the asks of the Government that I made during the Black History Month debate last year. The first was action to diversify the curriculum.

As I said last year, I want our children, black and white, in every single corner of this country, to better understand our national history and our national culture. This, of course, includes the good and the bad and the full range of experiences that people have had. I am pleased to see some progress on that and I pay particular tribute to the Welsh Government, who have become the first UK nation to make the teaching of black, Asian and minority ethnic histories and experiences mandatory in the school curriculum. The OCR exam board has also recently announced that it is doubling the choice of books by writers of colour in its A-level English qualification. But more action is needed from the Government on this, and I hope that the new Secretary of State for Education, who I congratulate on his appointment, will make this a priority. Black history is British history and we need to teach it all year round.

My second ask from the Government last year was to implement a race equality strategy and action plan. There has been much discussion in the past year about the inequality and structural racism that exist in our country, not least in response to the controversial Sewell report, but we have not seen anywhere near enough concrete action from the Government.

A race equality strategy and action plan covering areas such as education, health and employment is desperately needed. It should include specific proposals to address well-known inequalities such as the ethnicity pay gap, unequal access to justice and the impact of the pandemic on black people. I fully support my party's policy to

"implement a Race Equality Act to tackle structural racial inequality at source",

following the excellent work of Baroness Doreen Lawrence looking at how the pandemic has impacted black and other minority ethnic groups. I say to the Government: we have seen review after review, but now is the time for action.

I want to be clear that this discussion should not become a conversation about culture wars. In those culture wars, we end up pitting poor white people against poor black people. Some may say to poor white people, "You are in this situation because footballers are taking the knee." This place is better than that. In Black History Month, our message should be that we want to give black people hope and white people hope. Our message to white people in Black History Month is "Our history is your history too. A lot of what has happened to us involves you, too. We are not saying that you are responsible, but we are saying that we all need to better understand that."

I will not allow us to be divided. When we are divided, extremism flourishes. I will not allow that on my watch. Black History Month tells me to tell you that we learn from our past to build a better future. We must learn from our past to build a better future.

5.12 pm

The Minister for Equalities (Mike Freer): I thank the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) for securing this debate. I was keen to respond to it for the equalities team, because in my time in public life I have taken a long interest in working on equalities—not always on this area, but it is one that I want to pay attention to. I also thank colleagues who have come along to support or intervened to make specific points.

It is an important debate; sometimes people think that Adjournment debates at the end of the day are not important, but they are, so I appreciate everyone who has come along to support and take part.

During Black History Month, we rightly recognise the contribution of black Britons to our national life and history, from the Windrush generation—who helped to rebuild this great country after the war and rebuild the NHS, as the hon. Lady said—to those who continue to run the NHS alongside others. We pay tribute to those black Britons who have saved countless lives working in the NHS through the pandemic.

I do not have an answer to the hon. Lady's specific question about support, but I will make sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities responds fully. Generally, if there is anything that I do not cover or if any Member contacts me with questions that I have not answered, I am more than happy to ensure that my ministerial colleague writes back in full.

It is right that we pay tribute to those who take part in our life, especially those who are coming forward from the black community. I was delighted to see the Paralympic gold medallist Kadeena Cox at the first leg of the Commonwealth games baton relay in Birmingham earlier this month. At the relay from Buckingham Palace, it was quite inspirational to see one of our leading Olympians taking the baton. Her story is truly remarkable, and she is just one of the many inspiring black role models across our society in sports, arts, government and business.

If I may, I will embarrass the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). She will not remember this, but quite a long time ago I was at a dinner which she shared with Michael Portillo. It was a prize from a Stonewall fundraising event. I sat next to her throughout that dinner, and I am sorry to embarrass her, as a Tory politician, by saying that she was a role model. There was a regular feature on the back page of the *Sunday Times* magazine called "A Life in the Day". I remember saying to the right hon. Lady that she was the epitome of a constituency MP, and that I thought that that was absolutely inspiring. I am sorry to embarrass her with praise from this side of the House, but, although that may have been a long time ago, the memory has never left me.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead, following the events of last year Britain has engaged in a thorough examination of racial inequality, and in response the Government have carefully examined the evidence and data. We believe it is right to recognise where progress has been made, but also that we need to tackle barriers that still stand.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In just over an hour's time, York Labour will propose that York should become an anti-racist and inclusive city. However, we do not want that to be just a name tag; we want it to be about an action plan and about our path to the future. Would the Government consider funding such initiatives in order to ensure that that aspiration becomes a reality?

Mike Freer: The hon. Lady tempts me outside my portfolio. I cannot give spending commitments; the Chancellor might have a view on that, and my ministerial career might be cut very short. It has been six weeks so far, and I would like it to go on a little bit longer.

However, I will ensure that my officials take away what the hon. Lady has said and provide her with a full response. I cannot promise that it will be a response she will like, but it will certainly be a response. I agree with her that this is something that the Government should consider.

We cannot genuinely level up the country unless we remove the obstacles that stand in the way of some of our people, and it was in that spirit that the Prime Minister established the Sewell commission on race and ethnic disparities. I know that people may have different views on that commission, but let us park those and look for the good rather than seeking to dwell on what we disagree on. The commission published its report earlier this year, and it showed that racism and discrimination remain a factor in shaping life outcomes. For instance, discrimination against names that are recognised as not being traditionally British exists when CVs are reviewed in the jobs market. That should not be happening in Britain in 2021. However, the commission found that where disparities between ethnic groups exist, factors other than racism are often the principal cause. That needs to be explored.

I can assure the House that this Government are intent on doing everything in our power to drive out discrimination. For instance, we are shocked by the torrents of online abuse that our footballers received for no other reason than their skin colour. I hope that our Online Safety Bill remains ambitious, and will help to hold to account those who are cowardly enough to hide behind online abuse.

Let me turn to a couple of the hon. Lady's questions. One was about black maternal health. Our NHS makes the UK one of the safest places in the world to have a baby, but every death is a tragedy. Last month, NHS England published a targeted plan to improve outcomes for mothers and babies from ethnic minority groups, which will provide almost £7 million of support for local maternity systems. Our most senior midwife, Professor Dunkley-Bent, is leading important work in this area. We trust her judgment, and value the brilliant work that she is doing. Of course, with operational independence, we can ensure that the NHS listens and takes heed of what we want it to do, while allowing people to get on with their professional judgments.

Another issue that the hon. Lady raised was specialist ethnicity training for the police on domestic abuse, and it is an issue that I fully understand. This is a slight segue, but as part of my equalities brief I have been raising the ability of the police to respond to same-sex domestic violence. The hon. Lady has raised a very good point. Although our police do an amazing job in many areas, they are not always fully attuned to what domestic violence is really about. I know that domestic abuse affects a wide and disparate group and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate, particularly for those with specific needs such as ethnic minority victims.

Abena Oppong-Asare: One of the things I want to recommend is that the Minister meets representatives of Sistah Space, because they have done a lot of work on this, particularly on Valerie's law. I feel very strongly that they will be able to help the Government to implement something that would really benefit a lot of individuals across the country and also the police force. This would be in line with what has happened recently in working towards the Government's updated violence against women and girls strategy.

Mike Freer: I thank the hon. Lady and I will ensure that my ministerial colleague gets that message. I cannot commit anything into her diary, tempting though that is to ensure that she looks at this. We are continuing to encourage and cajole forces to take the College of Policing's domestic abuse matters training, which includes specific training on the different impacts of domestic abuse on black and minority ethnic communities. The hon. Lady makes an important point about speaking to those groups that can speak with a voice of knowledge and probably experience. I do not know the group that she mentions, but quite often these groups have personal experience, and that is far more powerful than any politician talking about the subject. She makes a valid point, and I will urge my ministerial colleague to take up that offer of a meeting.

The hon. Lady also talked about diversifying the curriculum. She is right to say that children should learn all aspects of British history. We must teach them about the contributions of Britons of all ethnicities who have made our country what it is today. The flexibility within the national history curriculum gives teachers the opportunity to focus on ethnic minority voices and experiences. Their contribution to our shared British history can and should be taught. We know that the vast majority of schools are already doing this, for example through discussing national events such as the Bristol bus boycott and the soldiers from across the world who fought alongside Britain in both world wars.

The hon. Lady has made some remarkably strong points. One of the things I always commit to when I am covering a debate for a colleague—although I am also part of the equalities team—is to ensure that the points raised are followed through on. I do not believe in standing at the Dispatch Box saying, “Yes, I’ll ask a colleague to look at it” without making sure that that happens. I will ensure that my colleague follows through on the notes that I have taken today.

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): The Minister's talks about the importance of taking things back to his colleague. I was really struck by the points made by the

hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) about the importance of hope and the importance of not sowing division. Will the Minister please take back those key messages, which have really struck me, to his ministerial colleague?

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend is right. There is a danger that people looking in think that we are always adversarial, and this Chamber can certainly be adversarial, but I tell people that behind the scenes we are actually much more collegiate than the television cameras suggest. Even when we have differences, I always want them to be respectful differences, so that we can work together to close any gaps in order to achieve the outcomes we want. Generally speaking, we all want the same thing. We might have differences of opinion on speed and on some of the actions, but I believe that we should create a constructive and collegiate way forward. I certainly hope that that will be my style going forward.

I should like to close this important debate by saying that racism has no place in our society and it is vital that the fight against it is emphasised not just during black history month but all year round. The Sewell commission made an important contribution to our national conversation about race and the Government's efforts to level up and unite this country. Our response to the commission will be published shortly. It will set out a cross-Government plan for building a fairer Britain. This means not only tackling discrimination but spreading opportunity, so that regardless of where anyone lives or their socioeconomic background, they can fulfil their potential. I am sure that this is a mission the entire House can and will support.

Question put and agreed to.

5.24 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 October 2021

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Climate Change Committee Progress Report 2021

1.30 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK's Climate Progress: the Committee on Climate Change's 2021 Progress Report.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. It is slightly regrettable that a similar debate is taking place in the main Chamber as we speak; it would have been nice to be able to speak in both, but this is one of the scheduling things that happens.

I think we all agree that tackling climate change is the biggest challenge facing humankind at present. Global temperatures have so far risen by 1.2° centigrade over the last century, and they are currently rising at about 0.25° per decade. That is being driven by the rise in greenhouse gas emissions—most significantly, carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is now 429 parts per million in the atmosphere, which is 50% higher than before the industrial revolution. Human civilisation is destroying the benign climate that our planet has enjoyed for the last 20,000 years and that enabled human civilisation to flourish in the first place. Our generation has a moral duty to pass on to future generations a planet that is sustainable, but it is also in our generation's self-interest to achieve that.

I am not a natural doom-monger but an optimist at heart. We have had far more than our share of dark times over the last couple of years, so I want to highlight some good news. According to *Our World in Data*, a fantastic source of information, the UK emitted less carbon dioxide per capita in 2019 than in any year since 1859, when the industrial revolution was just gathering pace—with the one exception of 1926, which was the year of the general strike. Our per-capita CO₂ emissions are the lowest they have been for a century and a half. In total, our CO₂ emissions have declined by almost a half since the benchmark year of 1990. That is not just a bigger decline than in any other G7 country; it is actually a bigger decline than in any G20 country.

“World-leading” may be a much-abused phrase, but it really is true that the UK is world-leading on reaching towards net zero. Our emissions per capita are now less than those of China, and they are one third of the levels in US, Canada and Australia. We emit less per capita than the EU average, less per person than Germany and less even than the eco-leaders Norway and Denmark. When I meet parliamentarians from other countries who are interested in environmental issues, the most frequent question they ask is: what is the UK's secret to doing so well in reaching towards net zero?

At the beginning of the industrial revolution, the UK was responsible for almost exactly 100% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We are now responsible for just 1%. That is a tribute to the hard work and leadership of this and past UK Governments, and I welcome the announcements that we had this week, which I will refer to later. It is also a tribute to those in environment groups and industry who have worked so hard to raise awareness of climate change and help tackle it. Their efforts are bearing fruit.

In its 2021 report to Parliament on reducing emissions, the Climate Change Committee recognises the UK's achievements. It says:

“The UK has a leading record in reducing its own emissions”.

That leadership role really matters as we head off to Glasgow for COP26, which the UK is obviously leading. We have enshrined in law not just reaching net zero by 2050, but a 78% reduction in emissions by 2035. That is the most ambitious nationally determined contribution that any country in the world is bringing to COP26—I hope that point is being made in the debate taking place in the main Chamber. Fingers crossed, such leadership will help us achieve more ambitious contributions from other countries. In turn, that will hopefully keep global warming down to a maximum of 1.5° centigrade—we need to keep 1.5 alive.

When it comes to net zero, we as a country can be justifiably be proud of what we have achieved so far. That is absolutely no excuse for complacency, but it means that our efforts so far have been worth while—they are paying off. But now the bad news: we are still not doing enough. That is the overriding message from the Climate Change Committee's 2021 progress report. If we are to get to net zero by 2050, the hard work has yet to come. We have reduced emissions by around a half over the past three decades, as I said, but it will be far more difficult to do the same over the next three decades. The CCC says:

“UK emissions are nearly 50% below 1990 levels, but the journey to Net Zero is far from half done.”

In policy terms, we have cut the fat but we are now down to the bone.

Most of our cuts in emissions have come from decarbonising the power sector. We are on the brink of phasing out coal, and wind power is now our main source of electricity—that was unthinkable when I was environment editor of *The Observer* and *The Times* 20 years ago. Other sectors have done well: emissions from industry have fallen by 53% since 1990 and emissions from waste are down by 69% as a result of sending less biodegradable matter to landfills. More topically, the CCC has reported that we had the biggest ever drop in emissions last year; as a result of the pandemic, they fell by 13%. Unsurprisingly, the biggest fall was in aviation emissions, which were down 60% last year alone. However, clearly that is a one-off and already bouncing back.

The good news is that our reductions in emissions mean that, in purely numerical terms, as of now we are on track to meet net zero by 2050. Our reductions have been big enough to get there. The CCC said that the rate of the reduction since 2012—over the last nine years—is enough to get us to net zero by 2050 if we carry on reducing at that rate. This is a very big “if”. The CCC report, using charts and graphs, said that we do not have the policies in place to keep reducing at that rate. The key message was that

[Anthony Browne]

“The Government has made historic climate promises in the past year, for which it deserves credit. However, it has been too slow to follow these with delivery.”

It warned that we will not meet our emission targets for 2028 to 2032—the so-called fifth carbon budget—let alone the sixth carbon budget of 2033 to 2037. At the time of its publication in June, it estimated that the credible policies covered only about 20% of the reductions to meet the sixth carbon budget.

This is all very perplexing: how can we be both on track, as I said earlier, but also off track? The best analogy that I can come up with is the 2010 film “Unstoppable”, about a runaway train—a very good film for those who want to pass a couple of hours. Our heroes, Denzel Washington and Chris Pine, keep the speeding, out-of-control train on track, but they know there is a sharp bend ahead. It is inevitable that when the train reaches that bend it will fly off the track and kill lots of people in houses, unless they do something dramatic. Likewise, we need to do something dramatic to stay on track for net zero by 2050. That means we cannot just keep on with the policies that have served us so far.

The decarbonisation of power generation is a one-off that cannot be done forever: once we have phased out coal, we cannot phase it out again. The Government have just committed to making all power generation net zero by 2035—something that I have publicly called for and welcome. However, that means that power, the sector that has done most of the heavy lifting to net zero, will not be able to do any more from 2035. Other sectors will have to make up the difference.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate today and for making a very thoughtful speech. In his remarks, will he address the point about energy usage and not just energy production? What more would he suggest to the Government that we could do to minimise energy usage and therefore reduce carbon emissions?

Anthony Browne: That is a very good point and I will come to it briefly. We need absolutely to try and get to net zero, but also to promote measures such as insulation and energy efficiency in housing and industry to reduce consumption.

We need other measures, rather than just decarbonising power. These other measures are where the potential political pain comes. Decarbonising electricity production did not really require consumers to change anything. The electricity supply to their homes and their sockets was the same as before, but produced in a climate-friendly way. They had the same cars and same central heating systems. However, with other sectors needing to decarbonise, future policies will inevitably have a more direct impact on consumers. That is why we need more political will in the coming decades, not less. This should be doable. The public are very supportive; a large majority say they want stronger action on climate change.

The CCC did welcome the advances in policy that have already been made. In last year’s report they made 92 different recommendations; this year’s report says that 72—over 75% of them—have either been achieved, partly achieved or are underway. That is a good record. However, it thought that things were going too slowly. It concluded that clearly policy progress is being made,

but it is not yet happening at the necessary pace. Only 11 of the 72 recommendations have been achieved in full.

The report states that in 21 areas of abatement—places where we can make real changes—sufficient ambition is being maintained in only four. The report welcomes the Government’s ambitions until 2025 on electric cars and vans, off-shore wind and tree planting. I very much welcome that here the Government are in line with the committee’s recommendations. In last year’s 10-point plan for climate change, the Government committed to 40 GW of offshore wind power by 2030, which is what the CCC is calling for—tick! They also committed to 30,000 hectares of tree planting a year by 2025, which again is what the CCC is calling for—tick!

In some ways, the Government have arguably gone further than the CCC wanted. It wanted to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2032, but the Government are bringing in the ban from 2030—two years earlier. That really is a world-leading ambition. Sales of electric vehicles are already escalating rapidly, and although the charging point infrastructure is not being rolled out quite fast enough for some electric car drivers, it is going at pace. Industry is taking the lead from the Government, with Jaguar having committed to selling only electric vehicles from 2025, and Ford has just announced that it will make parts for electric cars at its Halewood plant in Liverpool, giving it a new lease of life.

I am delighted to say that there has been significant progress since the CCC published its report in June and since this debate was applied for. In particular, the CCC was critical of the Government for not having published their transport decarbonisation plan, their hydrogen strategy, their heat and building strategy and their overall net zero strategy—it criticised them for the uncertainty and delay. To their credit, the Government published the first two, on transport and hydrogen, in the summer, and the heat and building strategy and the net zero strategy were published just a couple of days ago. Those included measures such as: a £5,000 grant to make clean-heat heat pumps affordable for homeowners; working with industry to ensure that clean heat is as cheap as gas-fired central heating by 2030; and a target to stop any new gas boilers from being installed by 2035—another world-first commitment.

The CCC has also chastised the Government for a lack of ambition on carbon capture and storage, which was the subject of a debate in this Chamber yesterday. It has said that we need to capture 22 million tonnes of CO₂ a year by 2030 while the Government were targeting only 10 million tonnes a year by then. It noted that that was the biggest single gap between what it had called for and what the Government were planning. When I drafted my speech at the beginning of the week, I was going to call on the Government to be more ambitious on CCS. Then, on Tuesday, they were: they announced two new clusters and a target of between 20 million and 30 million tonnes a year by 2030, which is potentially more than the CCC asked for. Hurrah! Those targets must be turned into reality, but the announcement is a big step forward.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the Government could be even more ambitious on carbon capture and storage by progressing the Scottish cluster on track 1 as well, instead of having it stuck as a reserve?

Anthony Browne: The more ambitious the Government are, the happier I will be, but I totally bow to the Government's metrics. The first two projects are right for the first phase, and the Acorn project is in reserve. I think the Minister said yesterday that being the reserve puts the project in a more advanced position for the second phase of the next two that will come—I am not sure whether anyone picked that up.

Alan Brown: It is still in reserve.

Anthony Browne: Hopefully it will get there in the second phase.

In my draft speech, I was also going to echo the Climate Change Committee's call on the Government to commit to greenhouse gas removal targets, for which they had no target at all. The CCC said that the UK Government need to target 5 million tonnes of removal by 2030. In the net zero strategy this week, I discovered as I read through it that the Government committed to do exactly that—I did not see that reported anywhere, however. They also committed to a robust monitoring, reporting and verification process for greenhouse gas removal, which the CCC called for and which I was going to call for. In short, many of the policy gaps between the CCC's report and Government policy have been closed since the report was published. Four months is an extremely long time in politics.

I strongly welcome this week's announcements, even though it meant I had to rewrite my speech. Yes, the strategies have been delayed, but I am sympathetic to how the Government's machinery has been distracted by the worst pandemic for 100 years. It is much better to have a good strategy late than a bad strategy early. However, there are still a few areas where more progress would be good. One of our biggest carbon sinks is peatland, and the Government are aiming for 32,000 hectares of peatland to be restored each year by the middle of the decade, but the CCC would like to see 67,000 hectares restored. That is quite a big difference. The CCC also says that the Government need to do more on consumer choice and behaviour: in particular, diet change—eating less meat, presumably—and reducing demand for flights. Those are indeed sensitive areas. I am hopeful that new technologies such as cultured meat and synthetic aviation fuels will help bridge that gap.

Dr Poulter: Picking up on the issue of diet change, concerns about meat eating always strike me as a contradiction in this discussion, when quinoa and other products are imported from overseas with huge numbers of food miles. Does my hon. Friend agree? Will he elaborate on his thoughts on how the British farming industry can contribute to the carbon reduction debate?

Anthony Browne: I welcome that intervention. I believe that any change in diet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would be, first, voluntary for consumers and, secondly, based on science. I do not know anything about the carbon dioxide emissions of quinoa flown in from other parts of the world. It clearly makes absolutely no sense for people to change their diet to eat food that increases carbon dioxide production. There is no point in doing things for tokenistic reasons to appear good or for someone to be able to claim that they are doing something good, when it is not actually good. I would certainly like

to see more science. We cannot go into it now, but there is quite a lot of debate about the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that come from livestock farming.

The other technologies are not yet commercially available. It might be that changes in behaviour might be needed at some point in the future, as well as new technologies.

I am also a supporter of nuclear power, which is one of the safest and cleanest forms of energy in the world. As many leading environmental thinkers such as George Monbiot now recognise, the green movement's long campaign against nuclear was a major strategic error. The reason why France's greenhouse gas emissions are lower than ours is that it properly embraced nuclear power. As a country, we have been wavering on nuclear for decades. I welcome the Government's new-found commitment to nuclear power and I look forward to future announcements. As I said in yesterday's debate on carbon capture and storage, I ask the Government to have the courage of their convictions.

We clearly need to do more to tackle climate change. Having ambition is not enough. We need plans to achieve those ambitions, and we need to implement those plans. The CCC report had some valid criticisms of the Government's plans at the time it was published, but the Government's plans have now largely caught up. For next year's CCC report, we should be well placed to get an A for effort. We will see.

I get frustrated when the more extreme environment campaigners often write to me and attack the UK Government for doing nothing about climate change. Where have they been? A huge amount is being done. Cutting emissions by nearly half in the last 30 years is not doing nothing. Closing down all coal-fired power stations was unthinkable when I was an environment editor—so was banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars; so was phasing out new gas boilers in people's homes. These are deep and wide-ranging changes that will directly affect us all and are genuinely world-leading, but we need to keep up the pace of progress. There is no room for complacency. We need to deliver. The CCC said that this is the decade of delivery. Let that decade of delivery begin.

1.48 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as ever, to serve with you as Chair, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne). In fairness, he tried to deliver a balanced approach and has succeeded, to a degree. I hope the Minister will take those rather sharp raps on the knuckles seriously—they are all the more important when they are from friendly fire. As the hon. Member points out, we have some real issues to face.

I was interested in the hon. Member's views on the benefits of the 1926 general strike. I grew up in a household where we always applauded the 1926 general strike and it is good to know that he is now a convert to that view of the world. The only doubt I have is that there was something slightly Pollyanna-ish, for those who are old enough to remember Pollyanna. The world is not quite as good as it might seem. Certainly, our world—the world of which we have control—has some long way to go. Yes, we have a good record on the reduction of carbon dioxide and so on, but it is not an excellent record. Some of it, frankly, is because we saw

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some types of de-industrialisation during that time period, which has allowed us to transfer the production of offending CO₂ to other countries, from which we now import. That is not necessarily a criticism per se, but it is something that we have to take into consideration.

The Climate Change Committee's report is tremendously important. It has established a baseline against which we need to measure ourselves. The overall message is that whether or not we have great plans, they are not being delivered. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) said to me a few moments ago, it may be an A for effort, but it is a D for delivery. I hope that the Minister will tell us seriously what we intend to do about that. We should look at the commentary and criticism in that report, such as the legitimate point that although we have done well on decarbonising electricity supply, we have a long way to go on agriculture, parts of industry, buildings and, of course, transport.

Hon. Members have complained that we have two debates on this subject today—one in the Chamber and one in Westminster Hall—rather like two buses coming along at once. I can guarantee that those would not be electric buses, because we are not yet there in terms of transport. There has been radical change, but even where I live, in the middle of the very busy, relatively modern city of Manchester, it is still difficult to find the electric charging points that would allow someone to make the transfer from conventional or even hybrid vehicles to an electric vehicle at this stage. There is a long way to go to make sure that the investment is there and to guarantee that the changes recommended by the Climate Change Committee are delivered and not simply planned.

Looking at other areas, I have long been preoccupied by the question of what we should do with our buildings, both domestic and industrial. We have something like 30 million homes across the United Kingdom, as a reference point—we can argue about that number, but it is not a million miles out. The overwhelming majority of those buildings—more than 80%—will still be around in 2050. That is around 25 million old properties that we have to bring up to a modern standard. That is fraught with difficulty at the moment because we do not have the delivery mechanisms to make it happen. I am sure that other colleagues will talk about the ambition around heat pumps; I would simply say that it really matters that there is ambition, and that the capacity to deliver heat pumps goes way beyond what we saw in this week's announcement. We have to see a radical, seismic change in terms of delivery.

Although even the very basic changes we need for our homes—such as cavity wall insulation and the capacity to properly insulate our roofs—are not difficult, they are difficult for an 80-year-old pensioner living on his or her own. I have experience of that in the past, when we have had improvement systems of different kinds and we are faced with the possibility of licensing cowboy builders to do work that rips off the public and does not deliver the social good that we all want. We need skills training that simply is not there at the moment, even for those relatively straightforward tasks.

Dr Poulter: On home insulation measures, does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a particular challenge in the private rented sector with poor home insulation

and, indeed, poor maintenance of those buildings, which often affects people on lower incomes? Does he agree that the Government need to do more to address that issue and to force, coerce and compel landlords to improve home energy efficiency in that sector?

Tony Lloyd: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I was going to come to that point. He is right. Of course, as a homeowner, I have an incentive to make improvements in my own home; I get the benefit of the more comfortable home and the lower fuel costs. However, a private landlord has no such incentive and a private tenant has no such ability to bring about those changes. The hon. Gentleman makes a very real point, particularly because we have an increasing number of private lets. As someone who, by force of occupation, has needed to rent privately in London, I have lived in places that I wish the landlord had had an incentive to improve, because very little effort was put in. It is a serious and important point, which I hope the Minister will pick up on.

The point I am making about buildings is that we lack the skills, and we are not delivering the training packages to introduce those skills. We also lack the confidence of the would-be consumer—whether a private landlord, an owner-occupier or whatever—to know that what is on the market is valid and can be trusted. If I were to ask Conservative MPs, even the esteemed former journalist, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire, which heat pump they would recommend for my home—

Anthony Browne *indicated dissent.*

Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman has the good grace to admit that, like me, he has not got a clue. However, we need to have an educated consumer and we need to change the way people see this matter. These issues are not trivial if we are to make a real difference.

Similarly, in the industrial sectors, some of the same kinds of issues arise. Asking huge organisations around the world, such as Amazon or Manchester United football club, that have the intellectual and surplus capacity to decarbonise is one thing, but for a small firm, which focuses just on its core business, being informed about how they can and ought to make a difference is much more difficult unless we begin to look seriously at the issue of consumer education.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire mentioned the need to change our diets, and possibly our attitudes to air travel. We have to take the country with us, and frankly we are not yet in a position to do so. This week there was a statement about the Government's net zero ambitions, but the media did not seem to pick up that issue and say, "This is the one we have got to go with." Education and taking the public with us was mentioned in the report, but we are still in the foothills of such a debate.

Alan Brown: I agree with the points that the hon. Gentleman is making about consumer education and the fact that more information should be available. In Scotland, the Scottish Government fund Home Energy Scotland, which is an independent, impartial body to give advice to people. Does he agree that the UK Government should consider that as a recommendation, so that consumers in England and Wales can access that impartial, independent advice?

Tony Lloyd: That is another important point. I think the Minister will accept my saying: I have been a Minister; never trust a Minister—partly because one day they will not be, and it will be someone else in the seat. Government should set the standards, but the delivery of that sort of information must be seen to be independent and to have sound validity for those involved.

When we look at delivery, one thing that is often missing from the conversation is the fact that central Government cannot deliver on many of these things. Central Government has to work through other agencies. That can be the private sector, but we need the strategic planning to take place at local, and sometimes sub-local, level. If we are going to not simply change attitudes but introduce the necessary infrastructure—the infrastructure of skilled training for the capacity to make the changes that we need—we must deliver locally. That does mean a much stronger partnership. Again, that is a recommendation in the report between central Government and local government. I say to the Minister that if that partnership does not include the proper transfer of funding so that local government can do this job, then we will be gifting the ambition but not delivering the tools with which to achieve it.

This is a very important report. Once again I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire. He is trying to deliver a balanced judgment. He is probably a little more optimistic than I, but he did emphasise that the crisis is not looming; it is with us. This is a call now to move beyond planning. Words can be good in setting ambition, but it has got to be now about serious delivery on the ground. We have had so many wake-up calls. This call says, “Now is the time for action.”

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): This is a very interesting debate. There is a parallel debate taking place in the main Chamber, where there is a three-minute time limit on speeches, I suspect. Before calling the last Back-Bench speaker in this debate, if anybody in the main Chamber is following what is going on in Westminster Hall, I am happy to accept additional Back-Bench speeches if Members show up, notwithstanding the fact that they were not here at the beginning for the initial remarks.

2.1 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, Sir Christopher. I think we may have another Back-Bench speaker whose name somehow did not make it on to the list. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) stole my gag about climate debates being like buses—two turn up at once but they are not electric buses.

I was one of the MPs who went outside yesterday to see the people who are pressing for more zero-emission buses. They had buses there from Ballymena, Falkirk, and Selby near Leeds to highlight the fact that, while the Government have pledged 4,000 zero-emission buses, only a small handful have appeared on the roads. Although the Transport Secretary responded to questions from one of my colleagues in the shadow Transport team to say that 900 were in production, we have pressed him on that since, asking where they are in production and when they are appearing, and he seems to have gone very quiet.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) on securing the debate, and I congratulate him on his optimism. We do need optimism when it comes to the fight against climate change. It can seem like a pessimistic environment. The zero-emission buses are an example of where the Government’s actions do not match their announcements. Unless we see an acceleration of action, not just warm words, we shall be nowhere near meeting the targets, which are good and ambitious. They set an example to the rest of the world, but if we cannot go to COP and demonstrate the real things that are happening on the ground, it all becomes greenwash, to put it mildly.

The Committee on Climate Change report is huge, but one recommendation goes to the heart of everything. There is a recommendation for No. 10 and the Cabinet Office that says:

“Ensure all departmental policy decisions...are consistent with the Net Zero goal and reflect the latest understanding of climate risks.”

That is where we need to be. Everything the Government do should be through the prism of trying to achieve net zero. We have the announcement of new fossil fuel projects—the Cambo oilfield and the Cumbrian coal mine. Lord Deben, chair of the Committee on Climate Change, has written to the Government to say that it is simply incompatible with our stated ambitions to allow those new fossil fuel projects to go ahead. Compare what is happening with airport expansion with the recommendations of the Committee that there should be no net airport expansion. The word “net” is important. Although it does not work in the current context, where Heathrow and everywhere else is pressing for expansion, there is an argument that, if capacity declined at Heathrow, regional airports such as Bristol would be able to expand, creating regional jobs and economic growth as part of that net calculation.

Take the Transport Secretary and the road-building programme, in which billions of pounds are going towards the construction of new roads. He was advised by his civil servants that that needed to be subject to an environmental impact assessment to see whether it was compatible with the Government meeting their climate change ambitions, and he refused to do so. I know that the Minister answering today is not from the Department for Transport, but that is another example of the actions of the Government just not squaring up with this recommendation in the Committee on Climate Change’s report.

The Australian trade agreement is another example. How can we claim to be serious about climate change and protecting the environment when we are more than willing to trade away environmental protections as part of a trade agreement? When the Minister was in his previous post, I asked him about potential trade agreements with Brazil and the relationship with that country in general. On one of his overseas jaunts, the Prime Minister congratulated President Bolsonaro on being an environmental champion. This guy is almost single-handedly destroying the Amazon by allowing huge numbers of people to be displaced from their land, and allowing swathes of forest to be burned and used for cattle ranching or the growing of various commodities—soya for livestock feed, palm oil, and so on.

It was sad how little attention was paid to that issue when we debated the Lords amendments to the Environment Bill yesterday. On the one hand, we have a

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Government who like to boast about how many more trees they are going to plant—at the last election, every party was trying to outbid the others as to how many millions of trees they would be able to plant—but that means absolutely nothing in terms of the net number of trees across the planet if we are allowing Bolsonaro to burn the Amazon to the ground.

One of the Minister's colleagues in the Trade team once answered a question that I asked them about this issue by pointing to the UK Government's giving money to Brazil for certain forest protection programmes, conserving parts of the rainforest or even planting new trees there, but if we look at how those numbers stack up against the proportion that is being destroyed, they are nowhere close. It is a token effort; it is well-meaning, but unless we do something through pressure in trade negotiations and at COP to stop Bolsonaro and others in their tracks, we will be destroying a huge carbon sink. We are now in a position where the Amazon is a net emitter of carbon: we used to talk about the Amazon as being the lungs of the world, but that is no longer the case, and that is something that the UK Government could do something about.

We now have the 1.5° target that we agreed at Paris, so COP should be about how we go about achieving that target, and we do need a lot of countries to set more ambitious nationally determined contributions. We are very concerned that China and now Russia will not be sending their leaders, so can the Minister advise us on what impact he thinks that will have on the negotiations? Will Brazil come to the table, and what pressure will it be put under at COP? Finance is incredibly important—trying to secure that \$100 billion a year—but as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on small island developing states, I would make the point that whenever I talk to those states, they say that this is not just about how much money is committed, but how they can access it. These are tiny countries with very small levels of resources.

Tony Lloyd: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. This is not just about money, but about the transfer of technologies. One of the things we saw during the covid crisis was that we were unfortunately quite reluctant to transfer technology, even in our self-interest. We have to allow the small countries that she has described to have access to the technology, as well as the finance, that makes the difference.

Kerry McCarthy: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In some cases, the populations of those countries are smaller than the population of our constituencies, so it would not be a huge effort on the part of the UK Government to prioritise them and help them make the transition to renewable energy. In some cases, it involves getting out of very difficult contracts, sometimes with companies that are based in the developing world and are tied into electricity supplies based on fossil fuels. There is a lot that we could do to help them. The main plea is that we have to simplify the process. We all know of small organisations in our constituencies trying to apply for, say, lottery funding, or bidding for other funds. They face a similar situation; the paperwork and bureaucracy are immense.

I was concerned to read today in *The Guardian* that a third of Pacific islands have said that they are unable to attend COP, partly because of covid. That goes back to the size issue. The people who would be coming over from those islands cannot afford to take a fortnight off work to quarantine at the end of the conference. When I asked the COP26 President, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), about that, he told me two things: that the UK would ensure that all people from small and developing states could be vaccinated, and that there would be funds available to bring them over. The reason that delegates at Paris moved from 2° to 1.5° was partly because of the personal testimony and presence of the Pacific leaders in particular, and leaders of small island developing states in general. That really made the change. Their presence and their voices at Paris shamed the world and highlighted the fact that in some cases those countries will literally disappear underwater if we do not keep 1.5 alive.

I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on another of the recommendations in the committee's report. It came up briefly at International Trade questions today, but the Minister did not have much time to outline the Government's position. The report lists as a priority recommendation that the Government should

“Develop the option of applying either border carbon tariffs or minimum standards to imports of selected embedded-emission-intensive industrial and agricultural products and fuels.”

Hon. Members can see why I had to write that down; it is quite a long phrase. As I understand it, we need to measure the embedded carbon in the products that we are importing into the country and find a way of dealing with it, and border tariffs may be one way of doing that. The report recommends that that should be discussed at the G7 and at COP, which is why I wanted to flag it up today. We should have those discussions.

I am aware that I have been speaking for quite some time, although I am also aware that, given that this is a three-hour debate, I could probably go on a lot longer. I am sure that people do not want to be detained, so I will just mention one more thing. It was reported this week that a nudge unit report on behaviour change, which recommended reductions in meat eating and measures to curb aviation demand, was buried. Can the Minister explain why that report has not been published and is not being discussed? We can talk forever about technological change, what the Government need to do and what needs to be financed, but behavioural change is a significant part of how we will meet our climate objectives.

In previous conversations, Ministers have suggested to me that they are quite reluctant to intervene in issues around the food agenda, plastic use and anything involving an element of personal choice. Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said to me that individuals could choose to bring their keep cup with them—like I have done today—so that they do not use single-use plastic, or that they could choose to eat less meat, but that this is very much a matter of personal choice: the market will respond if the public want it.

Particularly with meat eating, the market has responded, but some Ministers, from an ideological point of view, do not see a role for the Government in nudging it along. There is a real debate about whether it is acceptable to nudge things along rather than wielding the stick to

make people do things. That is the crux of the issue of whether we act upon the Climate Change Committee's recommendations. For example, they recommended a "20% shift away from all meat by 2030".

That is pretty unambitious, but there is an ideological debate about whether the Government's role is to encourage people to make the shift or to make them make the shift—using all the levers, whether they be carrots or sticks.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, but on that point, is it not true that people have a choice in the supermarket between buying a meat product or an equivalent plant protein alternative, but that nearly always—particularly at the bottom end of the price scale—the plant protein equivalent is much more expensive? The Government could introduce fiscal measures to level that up or even make the plant protein choice cheaper, given the climate benefit to that, but they are choosing not to do so. That would make personal choice easier. At the moment, the choice for people who cannot afford it is to buy the meat every time.

Kerry McCarthy: I agree with my hon. Friend. We had this discussion during the Agriculture Bill Committee, and I know that organisations such as Sustain were very keen on the idea that we could use agricultural subsidies to bring down the price of healthy food. However, we get into a difficult discussion about rewarding farmers for producing so-called healthy food. We could say that a potato is a healthy food, but if it gets turned into a bag of crisps it is not. If a tomato gets put in a ready meal with all sorts of other junk, it is not healthy. It is quite a difficult thing to grapple with, but I do not think that the idea of a meat tax is the way to go. I know that some people suggest that, but I think we need to look at how we can make healthy choices, and more sustainable choices, more affordable for people.

The same goes for electric vehicles. I very much welcome the zero-emission vehicles mandate that was announced this week, but the Government have been cutting the plug-in grants for electric vehicles year on year, and there are rumours that they will be axed entirely. From what I hear from the Chancellor, I think we are okay for the next financial year, but not beyond that. It almost feels as if the Government have decided that the grants that have been given out so far have done their job. They have stimulated the market, but if we are to get to where we want to be and have a vibrant second-hand market by the time that the ban on the sale of new internal combustion engine vehicles comes in, a lot more has to be done. At the moment, EVs are simply not affordable and accessible for many people, and that is partly because of the charging infrastructure points as well.

I have spoken far too many times about EVs in this place as it is, so I will draw my speech to a conclusion—as I am sure you will be very pleased to hear, Sir Christopher. As it stands, I do not think that what the Government are doing will get us to net zero by 2050, I do not think that we are on track to achieve the pledged 78% emissions reduction by 2035, and very sadly I do not think that we are on track to keep 1.5 alive.

2.17 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real pleasure to be back in Westminster Hall in person and to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I

thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) for securing the debate. He said that a similar debate is taking place in the main Chamber, which means that so many Members from across the House will be talking about the most important issue facing humanity: the climate.

I know we are talking about the Climate Change Committee, and I could quote Lord Deben at length, but I will start by quoting Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific officer, whom we have seen many times during covid:

"Only rapid and drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in this decade can prevent...climate breakdown".

He is obviously the chief adviser to the Government in this area, aside from the Climate Change Committee.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and as we found out from "The Great British Bake Off", baked goods that look great do not always taste great. That is the test for the Government. This week they have published their net zero strategy, with so many accompanying documents and reports that I have not had time to read them, so the Minister might be correcting me and others at the end of the debate because there is an answer to our questions. However, while things have looked good for a while, they have not tasted good, because the delivery is not there.

I will talk about the role of local government. Before I was elected to this place, I was the lead on climate change sustainability for Leeds City Council for a number of years. We started doing some great, groundbreaking work, but we could not complete some of those initiatives, because of Government policy and intervention, which stopped us in our tracks. Let me give two examples.

First, we installed 1,000 solar roofs on the homes of council tenants who could not afford to put solar panels on their roofs. We took those 1,000 households out of fuel poverty. We were able to do that because of the feed-in tariff. The cost of those solar roofs would be repaid in nine years because of the benefit of that feed-in tariff. When we were installing the solar roofs, the Government announced a reduction in the feed-in tariff and then another reduction, and it became uneconomic to complete the programme. We had an aim of 7,000 roofs. Interestingly, at the beginning of the programme, people did not want them. They said they looked ugly, but as soon as the first person in the street got them and reported how much they were paying for electricity, everybody wanted solar roofs, but we could not fill the demand because of Government intervention.

There is a real issue in my constituency. On one side of the main road we have a social housing estate where external wall insulation was provided because the eco-funding provided for that, and we managed to complete it after the eco-funding was cut, because we got a European regional development fund grant, which again is something that is no longer available to us. On the other side of the road, there is no external wall insulation, because there was no funding to complete the programme, and the people live in fuel poverty. That is an example of where Government interventions restricted a local authority's ability to deliver on climate action. It is important that the Government give local authorities the tools, funding and support to complete the work.

There are big gaps. First, local authorities do not have the staff to do the work because of year-on-year Government cuts. We are not talking about local authorities'

[Alex Sobel]

statutory duties; we are talking about local authorities having set net zero dates themselves. The earliest one I heard was Nottingham's, which was 2028. Leeds's was 2030, and I think Manchester's and Bristol's were the same.

Kerry McCarthy *indicated assent.*

Alex Sobel: Yes. So a lot of local authorities have quite short time periods to deliver net zero. They are not hamstrung by their own actions, but by Government actions. I hope that in the documents released this week there will be answers to local authorities' questions.

Kerry McCarthy: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Government have not reached out to leaders in the city regions ahead of COP? We know that on day 11 of COP there is a city regions day, but the Mayor of Bristol told me that there has been no discussion with Bristol, which is at the forefront of trying to introduce measures to get us to net zero. There seems to be a lack of communication between the Government and the people in charge of delivering the policies on the ground.

Alex Sobel: I have mixed news for my hon. Friend because the Mayor of West Yorkshire will be there on the 11th, and the Government have given her blue zone accreditation.

Kerry McCarthy: The Mayor of Bristol is going to COP and has blue zone accreditation, but he says there have been no conversations about all the documents the Government are publishing, and no discussions with city regions about what will be raised at COP and how things will go, and they are being left to the last day, on day 11.

Alex Sobel: I completely agree that metro Mayors have been an afterthought in terms of COP. My first COP was in Paris and I went, before we had a metro Mayor, as the lead representative. The French Government and the Mayor of Paris put on a huge set of events and incorporated cities from around the world. Given the issues that were emerging in the United States at that point, it was decided that the real deliverers of climate change measures on the ground would be cities and regions. The Paris COP was just after the election of Donald Trump. Thankfully, we are through that period now and we have a President of the United States who wants to take serious climate action.

On support for local authorities, they have their own internal staff to be able to deliver, but there is a huge skills gap across all the different areas. I would like to see the Government step up and fund skills training in all areas. We now have a situation where we have shortages of workers in a whole range of areas. It is really important for the country that we retrain workers in fossil fuel industries into these new industries and that we train young people into these jobs.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire mentioned the ambition around heat pumps. Apparently, 7 million to 11 million heat pumps are required by 2035. How many air and ground source heat pump installers have been trained in the UK so far? Not many. The number is in the low thousands—I am sure that the Minister

will have the exact number. That is woefully insufficient to deliver the ambition of the Government's programme. There are university technical colleges and building colleges all around the country that could be funded to train tens of thousands of people in these industries, which is what we will need, and not just in those industries.

To digress slightly, my next point is about the supply chain. I recently went to ITM Power in Sheffield, which is a manufacturer of electrolysers. Those are what we need to convert off-peak renewable electricity into hydrogen for use in buses and heavy goods vehicles, potentially in heating, in making steel, and in other industrial processes. ITM Power has 320 people in its plant and is training people, but it says that its big issues are support for skills training and demand for electrolysers in the hydrogen sector, because there is a lack of skills training for the industries that would use electrolysers. So the supply chain issues are huge, and I will come back to them. However, I have digressed a little from local authorities.

What do the Government need to do to support local authorities? For a start, what we are seeing now, in terms of the Climate Change Committee, is five-year carbon budgets. As we have seen, we are not on track to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. We will wait until the Climate Change Committee reports to see whether it says that, with the new plans, we will now meet those budgets; I still think that we will fall short of meeting them, because we have lost so much time. Because time is so acute—for local authorities, we are talking about timeframes of seven, eight, nine or 10 years to get to net zero—we need a practical framework for annual carbon budgeting, and we need to have shorter periods for measuring it.

Planning is a huge area; it is a really difficult area for local authorities. Time and time again, we see planning committees in local authorities—I know that it happens in my local authority in Leeds—where councillors want to turn down volume planning applications. I am not talking about somebody's extension on their house; I am talking about big developments. They want to turn them down on climate and environmental grounds, but the legal advice and planning officers say that they cannot turn them down, because they will lose on appeal.

We do not have a good enough planning framework to meet our net zero obligations, and those need to become non-negotiable. When the planning Bill is brought forward, I hope that that is where the Government will take it and that they will not, once again, lean in to the volume property developer community, which wants to do the absolute minimum. That community has really influenced the Government twice already: once when we had the code for sustainable homes, which was introduced in 2009-10 but scrapped as soon as the coalition Government came in; and then towards the end of the coalition Government, when the zero carbon homes initiative was also scrapped after the 2015 general election. We have lost 11 years on this issue; we cannot afford to lose any more time just because volume house builders cannot meet their climate obligations. They have had 11 years; they should have caught up. In every other European country, such developers have caught up, including in Holland, Belgium, Germany and Denmark. They need to catch up in the UK.

It is not good enough that we are still building homes without alternative fuel systems and saying that we will retrofit them in 2035. How much more will it cost us to retrofit those houses, rather than building them now with an adequate low-carbon heating system? Local authorities also need access to net zero funding streams to meet their own obligations, or the Government's obligations, around net zero.

I will just talk a little about the supply chain, because I realise that I have already talked for a considerable length of time, although I know that we have a little bit of time left in the debate. I keep speaking to people who are quite early in the supply chain; I just mentioned ITM Power. Yesterday, I spoke to people who provide the ships and the construction crew for offshore wind. I speak to people in the early stages of the supply chain for low-carbon solutions in every area. They raise the same issues every time. One issue that generally does not exist is lack of access to finance. The finance exists, but the problems are, first, the very short timescales for contracts and contracting. The Government need to provide confidence in long-term contracting.

Secondly, there are real issues around manufacturing capabilities. We do not have the shipyards and we do not have the number of buses being produced. Can somebody point me to a hydrogen heavy goods vehicle that has been produced in the UK? Not a single HGV has been produced in this country that will take hydrogen fuel. There are a few in other countries, so we are behind that curve. We need to be in a position to provide the confidence and the demand for low-carbon manufacturing and construction. Otherwise, we will be left behind once again, as we were on manufacturing wind turbines, where Denmark and Germany took a clear lead, and a number of other areas we could talk about, such as district heat and power and so on. Those are two areas.

The other area, and the most important thing, is that we do not have an end-to-end green industrial strategy, which means that people do not know exactly where they fit into the net zero pathway and the roadmap. All the Government's ambitions and targets need to fit into an industrial strategy so people know how everything works. Germany has an industrial strategy; the UK does not seemingly have one now. If the Government have published a really good one this week, I apologise to the Minister and he will tell us all about it at the end.

I will finish on this: my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) referred to the fact that a report came out from the nudge unit but was then withdrawn. It can still be found if people know where to look on the internet. That was the one I read in quite a lot of detail, because it is always interesting to know why the Government have withdrawn something after putting it out. There is one thing in there that was interesting.

One of the big challenges at COP26—it will be a success and I will give praise to the Government if their COP presidency stands out from that of every previous COP from Paris onwards—will be getting an international agreement on aviation and shipping emissions. There is a lot of talk about technological solutions to both aviation and shipping, but I am afraid that they are a long way away. If we talk to anybody in the industry, it is clear that we are still at a very early research and development phase. As to having this at scale, it is probably past the point of no return in terms of the climate.

We are going to have to manage demand, and on aviation the nudge report suggested that the Government should consider looking at a frequent flyer levy. The reason for that is that 70% of flights in this country, pre-covid, were taken by 15% of people. Demand for aviation is not evenly spread, whereas it is much more so with car travel. It is a small group of people, whether because they are involved in business travel or because they are individually well off. There are not many ways to change that behaviour, but the frequent flyer levy is one. I am interested to know why that report was withdrawn, why that is not being considered and where we are on managing demand if we are to have no net increase in aviation emissions in this country.

I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire again. I hope we can get this right and we can get an international agreement right at COP26. The climate and climate science will not compromise with us. This is not a political problem that we can negotiate with another country; this is a problem that is based on science, and science will not wait.

2.34 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) on bringing forward the debate. I was trying to make the point earlier that when he secured a debate on carbon capture and storage the Government, in a remarkable coincidence, decided what carbon clusters were going to go forward. He has secured this debate and the Government have printed their response to the Climate Change Committee's progress report and produced strategies. He must be feeling very productive. I wonder what is on the go for next week.

As others have said, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire made a thoughtful and balanced speech. There was a lot to be agreed on. He could have been a bit harder on the Government, but he did acknowledge that there is more work to be done from the Government and, critically, that we are not on track to meet the fifth carbon budget, let alone the final net zero target of 2050.

I disagree profoundly with a small part of the hon. Gentleman's speech, about nuclear energy. He said that nuclear energy is safe and clean. The existing nuclear waste legacy is going to cost £132 billion to clean up and dispose of. We still do not have a means of disposing of nuclear waste other than burying it for a thousand years. I take umbrage at that. The Government need to think again about nuclear energy.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) made a thoughtful contribution. He made an important point about housing and private landlords. He spoke about the need to involve local government, which is obviously a big theme for the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), who I congratulate on rising to the challenge of making this debate last longer. He did really well.

There was a thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who mentioned the key Climate Change Committee recommendation that all decisions have to be looked at through the net zero prism and to be compliant with net zero. She correctly highlighted the £27 billion roads programme

[Alan Brown]

and the decision on Cambo, which needs to be looked at, and other matters. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response to that.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire was more optimistic than the speakers on this side of the Chamber, which is understandable. He is certainly more optimistic than I am. That said, we must acknowledge the progress that has been made, which he rightly pointed out, such as the 40% decrease in emissions by 2019 from the 1990 baseline—the biggest emission reductions in the G20. We welcome that; it is a fantastic start.

The reality is that, despite the publication of the heat and buildings strategy this week and the net zero strategy, there are still huge policy gaps that mean that we will not achieve the intended target of 68% reduction in emissions by 2030. The Government need to address this quickly, but we are still waiting for the Treasury's net zero spending review. We know that the Treasury is, unfortunately, where the power lies, and it is the Treasury that will dictate how quickly the policies can be implemented. There is no clear plan on how to pay for the decarbonisation of our heating system. The UK Government have acknowledged that continually adding levies to our electricity bill is unsustainable, given that nearly a quarter of our bill is already made up of levies; and they still do not have a plan in place on how to fund the decarbonisation of our 24 million or so homes that are connected to the gas grid. There is no coherent plan for increasing the number of heat pump installations from 30,000 per year now to the stated target of 600,000 per year by 2028. The Climate Change Committee is clear about the extent of electric heating that is required, but at the moment the Government do not have the plans to match that ambition, and if they fall short there they will fall short of the 2030 nationally determined target.

The UK Government and the Minister seem to be putting all their faith in an announcement by Octopus Energy that it can make air-source heat pumps for the equivalent of the price of a gas boiler by April 2022. I really hope that Octopus Energy is successful, as it would be fantastic for industry and for enabling us to move forward much more quickly in decarbonising our homes, but a quick look on the internet today shows that a decent gas boiler can be purchased for £1,000, while air-source heat pumps are still in the order of £6,000 to £10,000. It is clear that the prices are not going to come down that quickly by next year. Air-source heat pumps are not a new technology. Other countries install many more heat pumps than we do in the UK, so there is no way that we could get such an exponential price drop, unfortunately.

The Government have tried to tackle the price differential with the announcement of a £5,000 grant. I suppose that is a start for the market and helps to close the gap slightly, but I am not sure that the Government or Ministers actually understand the amount of work required to install an air-source heat pump and the total cost. For a start, the home needs to be made energy efficient. That is good, but it adds cost and disruption. Generally, a new hot water tank will need to be installed in the property, which also adds further cost and disruption by requiring additional plumbing and possibly joinery work—adapting a cupboard or creating a space for the

hot water tank. Radiators and pipework might need upgrading, the existing boiler will need to be decommissioned—needing further gas engineer and plumbing work—and redecorating might be needed after the boiler is taken out. Considering all that work, that £5,000 grant does not get anywhere close to closing the gap between replacing a gas boiler and the total amount of work needed to install an air-source heat pump. The Minister will need to review that and his Department's strategy, or there is no way that they will meet that target of 600,000 installs per year by 2028.

The Government also need to understand, in general, how people replace their gas boilers. It is called a distress purchase because usually it is made when the boiler reaches the end of its life. If my gas boiler breaks down this winter, I might make inquiries about replacing it with an air-source heat pump, but if I find out that the pump and all the install has a two to three month lead-in time, I am not waiting the rest of the winter to get an air-source heat pump. I am going to buy a new gas boiler and pledge to myself that, some time in the future, I will get that energy-efficient air-source heat pump. That is the reality. As the hon. Member for Leeds North West said, we have a skills gap and a shortage of people with the knowledge and availability to do these types of installs. If that is not tackled by Government and planned for in policy, everything will fall short.

On heating in general, and decarbonisation, the UK Government remain open to the use of hydrogen. That is fine if they think it is a large-scale option that could progress, but if we are keeping hydrogen as an option and still want to progress ventilation air-source heat pumps, I suggest that the right place for them to start is with off-gas-grid homes. They should have a coherent programme that matches energy-efficient installation and air-source heat pumps in off-gas-grid homes, where people are more likely to be fuel-poor. That would scale up industry, reduce emissions, and help to tackle fuel poverty. That is where I would ask the Government to start.

The new heating grant announced by the Minister yesterday replaces the UK-wide renewable heat incentive scheme, but he has confirmed that the £5,000 grant is only for people in England and Wales, so Scotland has been completely excluded. Could the Minister explain why Scotland is excluded, and whether the Scottish Government will get Barnett consequentialso they can implement their own scheme? It seems ironic that page 27 of the heating building strategy states that

“Decarbonising our heat and buildings is a joint endeavour across the United Kingdom”,

because that is clearly not the case. What discussions did the Minister have with the Scottish Government before announcing the £5,000 grant scheme to replace the RHI?

On one last aspect of heating, the UK Government have clearly failed to meet the recommendation of providing a

“long-term policy framework to support sustained energy efficiency and heat pump growth at...scale.”

They have ignored the recommendation about bringing forward the target date for all homes to be EPC band C-compliant by 2028, and are instead sticking with the 2035 date. They have not set a date for mandatory hydrogen-ready boilers, and they need to make energy

efficiency a national infrastructure programme, in the way that the Scottish Government have. As another hon. Member said, 2035 is far too late for the phase-out of new gas boilers. That date needs to really to be brought forward.

Excluding Scotland seems to be the theme of the week for the UK Government. I need to say again that the decision to not include the Scottish cluster as a track 1 CCS project is disgraceful. It has been classed as a snub in the north-east of Scotland, and has in turn been widely reported in the press. It is not just Scottish National party politicians saying that; that is the feeling. It is a real snub to Scotland, and I urge the Minister to think again about that decision. He has still not been able to explain why the Scottish cluster has been tagged as a reserve, or even why he thinks he needs a reserve. Is it because he is not sure about the deliverability of the two clusters that the Government propose to take forward? It seems illogical, but hopefully we will get a bit more information about that.

On carbon capture and storage, although the Government have announced that they hope to progress to clusters, they have yet to agree a pricing model for the storage of carbon dioxide. We need to get that in place if we are going to progress carbon capture and storage, which the Committee on Climate Change has said is really important.

Tony Lloyd: An important point in the debate about carbon capture is a recognition that yes, planting trees is excellent, and the Government's ambitions will be really important if they are delivered, but we in England are destroying our peat bogs, which are a bigger carbon sink than the trees we will plant, and as we destroy those bogs, they become a source of carbon emissions. I congratulate the hon. Member, because Scotland is way ahead of England in restoring its peat bogs. It is a really important issue, and I congratulate Scotland on the approach it has taken. I hope the Minister will take it up with his colleagues in other Departments.

Alan Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and clearly I agree with him. It is great that he has recognised the work that is going on to restore peat bogs in Scotland. As he said, the UK Government's tree-planting target is welcome, but I am sceptical that they have a plan in place to meet that target. They have never met any target for tree planting to date, so the idea that they can scale up massively in a couple of years is beyond belief. I was going to mention tree planting in Scotland later on, but in 2019, 85% of trees planted in the UK were planted in Scotland via the Scottish Government's scheme. The Scottish Government have aggressively pursued tree planting—they have led the way on it—while the UK Government have not yet put plans in place to meet their ambitions.

There are too many policy gaps to mention, even though we have a lot more time today than we expected. We need to see an impact from the net zero aviation strategy, for example. I am not convinced by the plans that are in place. As the hon. Member for Leeds North West said, there is a transport decarbonisation plan in place, but when it comes to hydrogen and conversion of HGVs, we have heard the hon. Member for Bristol East say that not enough zero-emission buses are being produced. We really need to move quickly on these matters.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire complimented the work that is being done on decarbonising the electricity system. That work is truly welcome, but there is still not a proper plan for ending unabated gas-fired electricity generation by 2035, nor a proper structured plan for the decarbonisation of the electricity grid to meet the 2035 target set by the Government. If they are going to meet the target of a net zero electricity grid by 2030, there are some things that I suggest the Minister needs to be cognisant of. The Government need to review the grid charging system, which will end the farce of Scotland having the highest grid charges in Europe. That system disincentivises the construction of renewable energy production in Scotland—puts it at a disadvantage compared with projects in England—but it does not help the UK to meet its net zero target, either. We need to make net zero a statutory consideration for Ofgem, and the Government need to review the capacity market to address its reliance on fossil fuels, and allow storage that is co-located with renewable energy to be able to bid into the capacity market. Bizarrely, that is blocked at the moment.

As I touched on earlier, the Government need to end their nuclear obsession. Instead of spending another £20 billion on a new station at Sizewell, not to mention the billions they want to invest in small modular reactors and the mythical advanced nuclear reactors, they should be investing that money in renewable energy—in green hydrogen production and storage. The UK has now fallen behind France, the Netherlands and Germany in terms of hydrogen production proposals, so an urgent rethink of policy development is required. The 5 GW hydrogen target is not ambitious enough. The Scottish Government have a 5 GW hydrogen production target, so surely the UK Government need to up their game.

The UK Government should be investing in pumped storage hydropower—a proven technology that allows dispatchable energy to be added to the grid when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. This is something that can progress quickly. SSE is ready to progress with the Coire Glas scheme, and Drax is advancing plans to double output from the existing Cruachan dam pumped storage hydro plant. What is needed is a pricing mechanism to be agreed with the Government, like a carbon floor mechanism. I raised this with the previous Minister. Will the current Minister look at a pricing mechanism to allow pumped storage hydro to progress? It is a good use of renewable energy.

Wave and tidal turbine power—technology Scotland literally leads the world in—needs help to get to the next phase of scaling up. The industry requested a ringfenced sum of money in part 2 of the contracts for difference—round 4 is coming up shortly. Ringfencing money in part 2 has been done for floating offshore wind; all that the wave and tidal industry are asking for is the same ringfencing to allow them to compete and get a slice of the pie. It is believed that the Treasury blocked this ringfencing, which is ridiculous, considering that it would not have cost the Government any money. There is a risk that this technology will lose out and move abroad, and as happened with onshore wind, we will lose the opportunity to have the manufacturing set up in the UK and lose the export opportunities and growth that comes with that. Hopefully the Minister

[Alan Brown]

will listen the arguments. I would be more than happy to meet and discuss it, and he would be very welcome to meet industry representatives. Small changes could be made that will not cost the Government money, but could generate fantastic growth opportunities.

In Scotland's commitments to the Paris climate change targets and net zero, we are genuinely leading the way. We were the first Government to set a net zero target with a date of 2045, the first to declare a climate emergency, and we have set up the Just Transition commission. Admittedly, we also did not meet our emissions target of a 55% reduction by 2020, a 51.5% reduction is still fantastic progress. In Europe, Scotland is second only to Sweden in terms of the scale of reduction achieved. Interestingly, one of the reasons Scotland missed its latest target is that the process under way of rewetting peatlands necessitates the removal of some trees. As the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) pointed out, Scotland is doing fantastically with peat bog and wetland restoration, as well as having a fantastic tree-planting operation.

When it comes to energy production, Scotland has led the way in decarbonisation; last year, 97% of equivalent electricity demand was produced by renewable energy—this is absolutely tremendous. We have ambitious plans and we are making them happen; they cannot nor should not be blocked by decisions made in Westminster. I appreciate the UK Government does have ambitious targets, but as the report from the CCC shows, more policy and further intervention from Government are required—and they are required sooner rather than later.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Dr Alan Whitehead, I think you need to limit your remarks to 45 minutes.

2.53 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Thank you, Sir Christopher. I am always guided by your wisdom. I will attempt to restrain my remarks as much as possible, although, I am not sure whether I can get them done in 45 minutes. I hope I will be much briefer than that, because quite a lot of what I wanted to say this afternoon has already been said. That is a reflection of the very high quality debate that we have had.

I do not want to go overboard about this and start saying things such as, "Better fewer, but better"—better being the watchword for these sorts of occasions—which is actually a quote from Lenin, but it reflects very well on the Members present. I could not have asked for a better group of parliamentarians to debate this issue. Between us, we have addressed in a sober manner both the pluses and the minuses of where we stand on emissions. For the second day running, I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) not only on securing the debate, but on the quality and content of what he had to say. I know that is probably a career-limiting move on the part of an Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, but I really think that the hon. Gentleman did ample justice to his brief, albeit perhaps he pulled some punches a little because of his party political position. Overall, his speech was a sound and good exposition of both the pluses and minuses of our progress on climate change.

[MRS SHERYLL MURRAY *in the Chair*]

I will come back to one or two things that the hon. Gentleman said, but I also want to say that valuable additional points were made by Members from my party and the Scottish National party. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) emphasised the importance of buildings, heat pumps and the seismic change in delivery that we have to get into over the next period. Those were well made points, which reflected how we talk about what we have achieved so far and what we have to do in the future. That is a central point in our discussions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made some important points about transport and the difference between what we think we have achieved by putting something down on a piece of paper, and, when we follow it through, where we think that has got to. That was exemplified in her comments on the 900 buses that have allegedly been procured. Indeed, I was present at the visit to the buses yesterday, along with her and other hon. Members. That exemplified that we have some things that are an obvious next step in the decarbonisation of the transport sector. If it is possible to embrace an entire bus, we should be running off with those examples and planting them everywhere in the country as quickly as possible, yet we appear to be falling down badly in terms of how we roll out that fine ambition over a period of time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) emphasised the role that local government and a cross-departmental approach can play in the fight to reduce emissions across the board. He made a number of very telling points about what local government can and cannot do, and how much needs to be entrusted to local government in order to bring about emissions reductions.

I return to one or two of the comments made by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire. He made the important point that if we are to have a balanced assessment of where we have come from and what we are trying to get to, we should neither condemn a Government—or, in this case, the two Governments we have had from the turn of the century to today, or three if we count the coalition—for doing nothing, nor praise them for doing everything. We have to have a clear line between those two positions to make a sober assessment of just how much we have to do, and to place our successes and failures so far in context.

As the hon. Member also said, it is only possible to decarbonise our power sector once, which is an important observation for our record so far. Some people, talking about where we have got to, might say that we have done better than a number of other countries in the world, that we have reduced emissions substantially while expanding our economy, and then stand back with folded arms and say, "There we are—it is pretty much done, isn't it?" The Climate Change Committee's report gives a telling antidote to that stance. It draws our attention to not just changes in UK emissions over the period 2000 to 2020, but changes by sector.

A useful chart appears on page 20 of the report—I see hon. Members flicking through their copies to find it—which shows that there has been a stupendous change in emissions from electricity supply. We have done a fantastic job of decarbonising our emissions from electricity supply, which have plummeted from annual emissions

of about 160 megatonnes of CO₂ in 2000 to less than 45 megatonnes of CO₂. We see the wisdom of the point made by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire—we can only decarbonise these things once. Although we should go much further, and it is good that we have seen a proposal for the complete decarbonisation of the power sector by 2035, we will not be able to repeat that reduction in emissions in that sector, so we cannot set that achievement against what we need to do next in the areas we need to concentrate on for the future.

That same chart is alarming in a number of areas. We must enter a caveat about the deep reduction in emissions from aviation and surface transport during the pandemic, because all the evidence already suggests that they will pretty quickly return to their previous levels. In general, despite some reduction in emissions from manufacturing and construction over the period and a smaller reduction in buildings—albeit a flat line in recent years—emissions in most other sectors are flat or increasing. That means that, in effect, measures in those sectors either have not started or have been completely ineffective in reducing emissions. As we look at the overall picture, it is important to be able to say, “We have done well here and we have done badly there,” and, when we are judging the totals, we must carefully take that into account.

We must also carefully consider the proportion of emissions in those sectors. For example, electricity supply—power stations—currently accounts for 15% of emissions. Yes, we can achieve a reduction in emissions there, but those emissions as a percentage of total emissions are now about the same as those from agriculture and land use, yet emissions from that area have stayed static in the period. Therefore, among other things, if we continue to make progress in particular areas, as has been described, but others stay static, they will represent an increasing, and increasingly intractable, part of our emissions over the next period. To do nothing about aviation, shipping, surface transport and, certainly, agriculture and land use, or to ignore them or put them in the background, is nearing criminal. If we leave them out, they will be impossible to pull back later.

We need to look at the progress made under the plans in those areas and how well they are getting us towards the same emissions curve as we see in the power sector, and as soon as possible. In that context, the Climate Change Committee’s report to Parliament is telling. The committee is the most polite organisation that one could come across. Not only is it unfailingly courteous in personal dealings with Members but all its reports have “courteous” written through them, like a stick of rock. It does not jump up and down and scream, and it does not over-hype its statements; quite the opposite. Where necessary, it is careful to caveat them as far as possible. In those circumstances, it is sometimes accused of being a bit soft. I do not think it is, but it is rigorously careful and accurate in what it tries to do.

However, in reading between the lines, the progress report is a pretty coruscating condemnation of progress, particularly in the areas that I have represented to hon. Members. As hon. Members have mentioned, page 24 of the summary report shows the areas where progress falls far short of the Government’s stated ambition and commitments. In some areas the Government’s commitment meets what the Climate Change Committee said should be the pathway. However, in a number of other areas their commitment is failing very badly, and those areas

represent a large chunk of the overall emissions coming down the road, while those where they are succeeding often account for relatively small amounts of emissions. We need to try to get that into proportion as well.

Looking at what the Climate Change Committee said, something that we ought to think carefully about, which we have not done particularly this afternoon, is that the progress report is about not only mitigation but adaptation. Although there is a separate adaptation report, it comes under the overall ambit of the general report to Parliament. On adaptation, the committee says:

“A robust plan is needed for adaptation. The UK does not yet have a vision for successful adaptation to climate change, nor measurable targets to assess progress. Not one of the 34 priority areas assessed in this year’s progress report on adaptation is yet demonstrating strong progress in adapting to climate risk. Policies are being developed without sufficient recognition of the need to adapt to the changing climate. This undermines their goals, locks in climate risks, and stores up costs for the future.”

That almost sounds not terribly polite. It is waving a red flag about the disgraceful complete lack of any plan for serious Government action in this country on adaptation, which will really turn around to bite us in the near future if we do not get our act together. If the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is minded to apply for a further debate in this Chamber, I would suggest a specific debate on adaptation. It is a very important area, which we have largely missed out on, and we do so at our peril.

The committee’s report also reflected on the fact that, at the time it was written, the Government were in the process of producing a number of reports that had been promised for quite a while but had not arisen, such as the net zero plan, the transport plan, the hydrogen plan, and the heat and buildings strategy, which the Climate Change Committee was unable to incorporate into its report to Parliament because they were still anticipated. Just this week, no fewer than 1,800 pages of material finally came tumbling out of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Treasury and so on, with 10 days to go to COP26, rectifying a number of those emissions. I am afraid that, try as I might, I have not been able to get through all 1,800 pages by any means. It is apparent from reading those just how far off we are from getting to grips with things that the Climate Change Committee mentioned in its report.

Let me take the “Heat and Buildings Strategy”, which has just come out, as an example. I do not particularly blame the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for this, and hon. Members will have to take it from me, but the “Heat and Buildings Strategy”, which is an interesting report, has been written, in what we might call Shakespearean authorship analysis, by several different hands—I do not include the Minister in that. Broadly, I can say that the right questions have been written by one series of hands, and the wrong answers have been written by another series of hands, so the report does not cohere.

The answers to the ambition that the Climate Change Committee was concerned to underpin in its report to Parliament are not very ambitious at all. There is a really lame response to the question of how we go about the insulation and energy efficiency upgrading of our homes, which, as everybody knows by now, is a sine qua non of a load of actions in other areas, as we have mentioned already.

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) unpacked some of the issues on heat pumps. We know that they will not work in badly insulated homes. We have an ambition for heat pumps, but there are all sorts of issues even within the report about the difference between the ambition of 600,000 heat pumps a year by 2030 and the practical issue of who will be trained up to install them, whether they will be manufactured in this country, and which sectors will have heat pumps in them. I note, for example, on the Government's ambition for 300,000 homes a year, that it is suggested that heat pumps will go into only about 60% of them, so we have the prospect of new homes being built with gas boilers in them, which will have to be retrofitted pretty shortly afterwards, but we will perhaps let that pass us by.

On how the paper addresses our overall ambitions, the sector, as the strategy sets out, occupies 23% of emissions just on heat. So when we talk about the energy sector, we are talking about heat being much more important in terms of emissions than power, and it is heat that we have made virtually no progress on at all. The overwhelming majority of our homes are still heated by gas, and that figure has remained fairly static for a fairly long time. A strategy that proposes more heat pumps only works if we deal with other heat factors, particularly how much heat we lose from our buildings, how meaner we could be in our use of heat in buildings in future, and what sort of win-wins we might have in insulating our homes, and we must deal with fuel poverty and various other such things.

One would think that a strategy of energy efficiency should run alongside everything else that we do on heat generation. That one thing, with the exception of some short-term, fairly small amounts of funding for particular projects in the strategy, is sorely missing. I do not know, but I would speculate, bearing in mind the different authors of the report, that perhaps a much more ambitious strategy was in the minds of BEIS, and certain other people came along and crossed a nought off the end of each of the amounts of money in the strategy. It woefully misses the opportunity to really go forward on getting heat firmly in our sights as far as decarbonisation is concerned.

The hydrogen strategy that has come out is interesting, premised on the progress report to Parliament. It does not have any path by which we can develop green hydrogen, which of course is the element of hydrogen that will do the work of decarbonisation. Unless we have a decent path for developing green hydrogen over the period, we will not make the progress that we should on climate change and emission reductions.

As I said, I have yet to go through all of this, but I think we are simply not articulating our own ambition on carbon reduction and getting the details of how we do it right. Indeed, not only are we a long way from that in some instances, but in others we are not even addressing it. I am interested to reflect on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West about the nudge unit report that came out recently. It was nudged into public view and pretty immediately nudged out again, within I think a day of being published. One of the reasons for that is because the nudge unit drew our attention to some very

difficult areas that we have to get to grips with, but we have hitherto walked on by on the other side of the street.

I know that to my cost. Recently, I think at a fringe meeting at the Labour party conference, I ventured the opinion that we will have far fewer livestock farmers in our country in 20 years' time. That is a straightforward statement of understanding of what we have to do in the agricultural and land use sector, what we have to do about our diets and how we deal with emissions in our food chain, and many such things. I got absolute grief. Indeed, I got a number of angry invitations in my in-tray to visit some farms and see what is really happening, and so on. I know it is a really difficult issue, and that we will have to do a lot of just transition-type work in getting it right, but it is an issue that we have to face. I am afraid that the Government are not doing that in a number of areas as far as emission reductions are concerned.

My conclusion, which I hope will be pretty widely shared across the Chamber, is that although we have done well so far in our emission reductions process, we need to unpack that to understand where we have done quite well and where we have done badly, so that we have better pointers for the future. As things stand, we appear to be nowhere near meeting the challenges ahead of us on climate change reduction. A lot more new policies and new thinking will be needed to get us anywhere near those targets. Regrettably, as the strategies come out they do not appear to rise to that challenge. I hope that this afternoon the Minister will be able to respond to the debate in that vein, because I hope that I have given a reasonably accurate picture of what the Climate Change Committee says and what hon. Members have said in this Chamber today.

I have not quite taken my 45 minutes, Sir Christopher—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, Mrs Murray; while I was talking, you snuck into the Chair.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (in the Chair): I snuck in.

Dr Whitehead: Obviously, the previous Chair just could not stand the idea of being there for the entirety of my speech and has left.

I hope that this debate will serve as almost a watchword for how we approach our task over the next period. We need to work soberly, carefully and, as far as possible, on a consensual basis, for the future of our climate goals, but also with a clear-eyed recognition of just how far we have to go and how difficult many of the choices will be. We need to face them together, creating solutions that can actually work in our national and, indeed, international interests.

By the way, even though it was very late in the day, I understand just how much work has gone into these documents and how hard people have worked at getting them out, and indeed how they have attempted to address the choices in front of us in a real way. I do not underestimate any of that. My criticisms are based on what we have to do politically to address these issues for the future. I am not in any way attempting to denigrate the people who have put these documents together.

That is the offer from the Opposition, and that is what we want to do—to move us forward in the face of this tremendous challenge and the really daunting task

ahead of us. And if we can manage to conduct our future debates as well as we have managed to conduct today's debate, that will be a great help in this process.

3.27 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Hands): Let me begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for nominating this important debate today, and I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) for his very able introduction to it. We were sitting in exactly these seats yesterday during his last Westminster Hall debate, which was on the interesting subject of carbon capture and storage, a subject that has also cropped up in today's debate.

Of course it is vital that we focus on clean growth and the Government's vision for transitioning to a net zero economy. This has been a very useful debate, with a very high degree of consensus, which of course the Government welcome.

First, the Government welcome the Climate Change Committee's 2021 "Progress in reducing emissions" report, which highlights our successes in setting an ambitious climate mitigation agenda while also providing healthy challenge to our progress to net zero by 2050. The point of having this kind of Committee is for it to keep challenging the Government and to ensure that the Government are straining every possible muscle to get to that target and get there in good time.

The report correctly emphasises that the journey to net zero is not yet half-completed and that this decade is the decisive one for tackling climate change, which Britain must take a leading role in. Of course, that is why on Tuesday we published our net zero strategy, which has been referred to many times; I welcome the Opposition's praise for my officials and my ministerial team for the work that they have put into it. I know that a lot of my team have been working very long hours to get the strategy out there and to do so on time.

The strategy delivers a comprehensive set of measures to support and capitalise on the UK's transition to net zero by 2050. It outlines measures to transition to a green and sustainable future, and to help businesses and consumers to move to clean power, supporting hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs and leveraging up to £90 billion worth of private investment by 2030.

We have already set out a lot about our journey to net zero. Over the past year alone, we have published the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution, the energy White Paper, the North sea transition deal, the industrial decarbonisation strategy, the transport decarbonisation plan, the hydrogen strategy and, most recently, our heat and buildings strategy.

Dr Whitehead: Would the Minister be able to provide us with some helpful guidance on the production of those documents, and set it against what the Climate Change Committee has been doing with its carbon budgets and so on? Does he consider that as a result of those documents being published and their contents, we are now on course to meet the terms of the sixth carbon budget?

Greg Hands: Our position on the sixth carbon budget is unchanged, as the hon. Gentleman knows. However, I am a believer in an active Government, and publishing a set of strategies does not necessarily mean that we have reached the point that we want to reach: it merely lays out the map and sets out the process, which I think is very helpful. In terms of delivery, obviously the onus to fulfil these objectives is on not only the Government, but every citizen of this country and, indeed, the whole world.

We have just unveiled a landmark commitment to decarbonise the UK's electricity system by 2035, to help us build a secure home-grown energy sector that is not reliant on fossil fuels and exposure to volatile wholesale energy prices, which as we know are very much in the news at the moment. However, the science could not be clearer: by the middle of this century, the world needs to reduce emissions to as close to zero as possible, with the small amount remaining sucked up through natural carbon sinks such as forests and relatively new technologies such as carbon capture. We are proud to lead the world in ending our contribution to climate change, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because we are determined to seize the unprecedented economic opportunity it brings. We want to build back better from the pandemic by building back greener and levelling up our country with new high-skilled, high-wage, sustainable jobs in every part of the United Kingdom. Those jobs will be spread across the UK, with specialists in low-carbon fuels in Northern Ireland, low-carbon hydrogen in Sheffield, electric vehicle battery production in the north-east of England, green finance in London, more engineers in Wales, and offshore wind technicians in Scotland.

The strategy builds on all the progress that the UK has already made. In June 2021, the UK Government set the sixth carbon budget at 965 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalent, a world-leading target that will mean a 78% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 compared with 1990 levels. This is in line with the latest science, as the level recommended by our expert advisers at the Climate Change Committee, and is consistent with the Paris agreement's goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 °C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°. The target would achieve well over half of the required emissions reductions from now to 2050 in the next 15 years.

Turning to the points raised during the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire has pointed out that a parallel debate on COP26 is taking place in the main Chamber, so anybody watching the debate might wonder why there are not more Members here. The overlap has been considerable. He also rightly pointed out the UK's huge success—in 2015, we emitted the lowest amount of CO₂ per annum since 1859—and then he got Opposition Members a little bit excited with his reference to the 1926 general strike. I do not think my hon. Friend thought of the 1926 general strike as something we would wish to emulate, but I noted from interventions and comments made by Opposition Members that they perhaps thought it was. It was very important that my hon. Friend quoted the 2019 figure, because emissions obviously went down quite a bit during the pandemic, so it is important that we look at a more robust figure, such as that from 2019. As he said, it was the biggest decline in the whole of the G20 since 1990:

[Greg Hands]

we emit less per person than the EU average, and less than Denmark or Norway. All of those were incredibly strong points.

I was thinking back to the 1990 benchmark for all those emissions. The nearest election to that time was the 1989 European elections, which were not memorable for anything other than the fact that they were the high point in the performance of the UK Green party. It was the year when the Green party got more than 10% of the vote overall. It ran on a manifesto that it was impossible to do anything to reduce emissions while still growing the economy. We had to reduce growth in the economy and reduce its size to do something about emissions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire has pointed out, the incredible success in the 30 years since, during which the UK has grown the economy by 78% while reducing emissions by 44%, demolishes the case that was made at that time by the UK Green party and others. He also makes the good point that the hard work is yet to come. It gets more difficult and the low-hanging fruit has already been picked. Now we have the harder job ahead of us. He talked about carbon capture utilisation and storage and I refer, as in yesterday's debate, to the fact that the Carbon Capture and Storage Association described Tuesday's news as "amazing". I will come back to the Scotland issue in just a moment.

On peatland, my hon. Friend rightly pointed out the Climate Change Committee's recommendation to restore 67,000 hectares. Currently, only 32,000 hectares have been restored. We are committed to restoring 35,000 hectares by 2025 and 280,000 hectares by 2050. Other points included consumer choice and diet style and those also cropped up later in the debate, as well as the importance of nuclear power. I noticed that two Opposition MPs here today, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), were first elected in 1997, running on a manifesto of ending new nuclear power plants in this country. It was part of the new Labour manifesto of 1997, which I think did so much damage to the nuclear industry in this country and effectively cost us a lost generation in nuclear capability.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire that the decade of delivery has come.

Alan Brown: What is the Minister's estimate of the capital cost of new nuclear that the Government are willing to commit the UK to?

Greg Hands: That is a slightly open-ended question, as the hon. Gentleman knows our commitment is to the existing Hinkley Point C facility. We are committed to bringing forward one further station for its investment case in this Parliament and on Tuesday we also allocated £120 million for a new nuclear innovation fund, which increases the optionality. What are the options for the UK in nuclear capability and capacity going forward? I just wish we had a more positive attitude on nuclear from the SNP. Scotland is part of this country's nuclear heritage and it disappoints me continuously to see the SNP not seeing the opportunities available for Scotland in so many of our energy and climate change programmes.

Alan Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will make some progress.

On transport, the hon. Member for Rochdale makes some good points. Let me tell him what we are doing on transport: the zero-emission vehicle mandate, improving consumer choice; further funding of £620 million for zero-emission vehicle grants; allocating a further £350 million of our up to £1 billion automotive transformation fund to support the electrification of UK vehicles; £3 billion on integrated bus networks; and a £2 billion investment to enable half of journeys in towns and cities to be cycled or walked by 2030. Those are big commitments.

The hon. Gentleman talked about homes and the boiler upgrade scheme. It is exciting, but slightly buried in all the news about net zero overnight, that one of the energy companies—it is Octopus Energy, but I expect others are either there or will follow—said that it is confident that by April next year, the installation price of a new heat pump will be equivalent to the price of a natural gas boiler. This is one of the important points about what the Government can do. The Government will not come round to everybody's home, across the whole UK, and install a heat pump. That would be impractical and it would potentially be beyond the means of the Government and the taxpayer to do that. What we are doing is kick-starting a market and kick-starting private sector innovation to come along and do it, and we are already having an impact in what we are doing on heat pumps.

Alan Brown: The Minister is citing Octopus again, but can he tell me, then, what he thinks the installation price of an air source heat pump will be in a year's time? Did he listen to the points that I made about all the other installation costs that need to accompany an air source pump? Can he give an estimate of what the total cost of that installation would be?

Greg Hands: I will not go further down the road of making price or market predictions. What the Government need to be in the business of doing is kick-starting the market, stimulating the market, and getting it going. I do not think it is in my interest to set out predictions of what I think supply, demand or pricing might be in a year's time.

Tony Lloyd: I am genuinely grateful to the Minister for giving way. By the way, I was first elected in 1983 on what was euphemistically called "the longest suicide note in history", so there are many examples that we can quote.

On the issue of heat pumps, I would put it to the Minister that to give the public confidence in the installation of heat pumps, they first need to know the technical specifications, that they are sound and that there are qualified installers. That means training, which we have discussed already today, but it also means something else. Heat pumps do not work very well unless we have well insulated properties. A combination of things are required in order to make that real difference. I hope that the Minister will address not the '83 question, but the question of how we deliver heat pumps that work.

Greg Hands: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I will come on to the point about installation. He also makes a very good point about insulation and the

importance of well insulated homes, which I think nobody denies. But let me just return to the points that he made in his speech.

Local government and local delivery are incredibly important. It is very important that local leadership is seen on climate change. I see it from Mayors such as Andy Street and Ben Houchen and also some Labour Mayors. I think Andy Burnham, the hon. Gentleman's local Mayor, has been quite good in this space as well. It is important that we all see climate change and taking action on climate change as a cross-party issue involving all the tiers of government and all the available parts of government across the whole United Kingdom.

On energy usage, the hon. Member for Rochdale asked what more the Government can do to address consumption and reduce emissions. The heat and buildings strategy addresses consumption in homes. For example, we provide increased support for low-income households through the home upgrade grant. We are committed to upgrading fuel-poor homes to energy performance certificate band C by 2030 where reasonably practicable. And there is our social housing decarbonisation fund, with £800 million provided. I think that the hon. Gentleman also asked about hydrogen investment. The net zero strategy confirms the industrial decarbonisation and hydrogen revenue support scheme, supporting blue and green H₂ production. It could lead to 1.5 GW of new capacity.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) asked about quite a number of things, some of which are familiar themes. I just remind her that Cambo has already been licensed as a field, in 2001 and 2004.

I could fill the remaining time on airport expansion. Mrs Murray, you will remember that I resigned from the Government in 2018 over airport expansion at Heathrow. I note that, since I resigned, that airport expansion has not happened and I am not seeing any sign of it happening anytime soon.

The hon. Lady asked about trade agreements.

Kerry McCarthy: Would the Minister like to advise us as to whether, if proposals to expand Heathrow are resurrected—obviously, over the last couple of years there has been the pandemic, which has hit aviation—he will resign again?

Greg Hands: Again, that is a temptation down a particular road, but let me say this. The Government are absolutely clear that all further airport expansions must be consistent with our climate change obligations. Government policy is absolutely clear on that.

Dr Whitehead: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will make a bit more progress.

Nothing in a trade agreement prevents our ability to regulate environmentally or prevents the UK fulfilling its climate change obligations. The hon. Lady asked about COP26 leaders, and I can give her an update. We have a stellar array of world leaders coming for COP26, including President Biden and the four Ms—Prime Minister Modi, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, President Macron and Chancellor Merkel. We have leaders of medium-sized economies who will be really important. I spoke earlier today with the Vietnamese Energy Minister Dien and the Vietnamese Prime Minister Chinh is coming. Vietnam is an important player, as

well as an important ally and friend to the UK. Its current plans are to double coal usage over the next decade, which will not set the right tone at COP26. We are looking forward to welcoming a wide variety of leaders, some of which are close friends and allies of the UK, and developing economies, of which Vietnam is just one, are also coming.

In terms of the carbon border adjustment mechanism, we watch all the proposals very closely. We need to make sure they are World Trade Organisation compatible, that they are not a disguised form of protectionism and that they do not discriminate unnecessarily against developing countries. Departmental policy decisions are consistent with net zero. We have established two Cabinet Committees dedicated to climate change. The Environment Bill requires the Government to reflect environmental issues in national policy making through consideration of the five environmental principles.

Where are the two EV buses? We have delivered the national bus strategy, investing £12 billion in local transport systems over the current Parliament and delivering 4,000 new zero-emission buses.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) spoke of a scenario where one person on a street puts in solar panels and everybody else says, "I want a piece of the action." That is a great example of the Government simulating demand. It does not mean that the Government should come down the road and install everybody's solar panels, though. It shows the effectiveness of Government policy in getting people to sit up, take notice and want to take advantage of something. That is what the role of the Government can be. Heat pumps will be exactly the same.

Alex Sobel: To complete that programme, the local authority and housing associations need a payment mechanism. Would the Government not consider using feed-in tariffs just for councils and social housing, not for the private housing sector?

Greg Hands: I have already outlined the support we are giving to the housing sector overall. If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member wants to write to me with a specific proposal, I am happy to look at it. I have to say, I was not entirely sure about his recent history—he mentioned COP21 in relation to the election of Donald Trump, which of course came after that, but I may be misremembering his speech, so I will not go down that road.

How many people have been trained in heat pumps so far? We want more to be trained. The figure is around 3,000 and we require 35,000, so that is definitely a challenging position. We have set out Government policy and the direction of travel on heat pumps very clearly and we are waiting for the market to respond.

Dr Whitehead: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to make progress. On Germany's net-zero strategy, I shared a platform with the German ambassador last night, and both of our countries are very supportive of each other's policies on net zero and the environment. We consider ourselves to be world leaders in this space. On retrofitting, we are committed to supporting businesses and households to upgrade energy efficiency in buildings.

Dr Whitehead: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to make a bit more progress. We intend to upgrade as many homes as possible to energy performance certificate band C by 2035.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) talked about the heat pump grant scheme. I am amazed by that. It is a devolved matter, but there have been discussions with the Scottish Government about the Scottish Government joining up with us and participating in this scheme; but if I understand the situation correctly, they have refused. The irony is that the Ofgem team that will be administering the England and Wales scheme will be based in Glasgow, with more than 100 new members of staff. Unless they have a very long commute, they will not be able to benefit from the scheme that they are helping to administer, due to the fact that the Scottish Government have said that they will not be joining the UK Government in the scheme. That is a great pity.

Alan Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: If the hon. Gentleman has some hot news from the Scottish Government, over to him.

Alan Brown: I have not had time to get on the hotline to them. On the point about the additional members of Ofgem working in Glasgow, that is very welcome and I hope they will not have a long commute—that would not be good for climate change overall. The more serious point is about what funding is coming to the Scottish Government to run their own scheme.

Greg Hands: The Barnett consequential will of course be enacted in the usual way as we would expect, but why not join with a scheme that has been very well received, that I think will be a market leader and that will, ironically, be administered out of Glasgow? It makes perfect sense for the Scottish Government to come on board with us.

We have made huge investments in offshore wind and other renewables in Scotland. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun mentioned the 5 GW target for hydrogen being less than in Germany. It is the same as Germany's target—they have exactly the same target. On wave and tidal, we have already put down more than £175 million in innovation funding across this country, with 10 MW already deployed. In many senses, they are still pre-commercial technologies, but we are making the investment to increase the optionality that will be available in wave and tidal.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's overall support for the UK's targets and ambitions. He mentioned reforms to the electricity market. We recently published a call for evidence on actions to align capacity markets with net zero and actions to encourage the participation of more low-carbon capacity. We are committed to accelerating the deployment of low-cost renewable generation through the contracts for difference regime and by undertaking the review of the frequency of CfD options.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test, in a comprehensive speech, congratulated us on our success in decarbonising electricity generation. I go back to the commitment given to complete that process by 2035. He said that we are ignoring other areas. I do not think that is fair and I do not think that is the case. He talked

about adaptation. We are currently developing a national adaptation programme, which is due in 2023. DEFRA published the response to the Climate Change Committee's adaptation report, which goes into more detail on our progress on adapting to climate change.

On fossil fuels and net zero, of course net zero does not necessarily mean zero residual emissions in all sectors of the economy. It is, after all, a net zero figure. In aviation, agriculture and industry it may not be feasible, practical or cost-effective to eliminate all emissions.

I thank the hon. Member for Southampton, Test for his praise for the hard work put in by my officials on producing the reports.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun asked, "Where is the Treasury review of the cost of net zero?" I have news for him—I emailed it to him about 15 minutes ago. It was published on Monday night. It is entitled, "Net Zero Review: Analysis exploring the key issues". There are 135 pages for him to digest before I see him next, when he can ask me questions about it. It was published at the same time as, or just before, the net zero strategy.

In the past few years, the Government have gone further than ever before to ensure that the climate is at the heart of our decision making. We have taken new approaches to embed net zero in spending decisions, including requiring Departments to include greenhouse gas emissions in their spending review bids and their impact on meeting carbon budgets and net zero. As I already said, we have established two Cabinet Committees. The integrated review reflects that and ensures that it is the Government's No. 1 international priority. We are also using the Environment Bill to require the Government to reflect all these issues in national policy.

We are committed to taking a whole-system approach to the net zero challenge, ensuring that we understand and can navigate the complex ways that our climate goals will interact with other priorities for the country. As I mentioned, we published the heat and buildings strategy, which sets out the required actions to decarbonise buildings over the next decade, helping meet near-term carbon budgets and getting us on track for net zero by 2050.

Dr Whitehead: Now that he has almost finished, will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Greg Hands: I will finish, as I have been speaking for almost half an hour. The net zero strategy sets out clear principles on how we will engage the public and support them to make green choices. We will explore how to enhance public-facing climate content and advice on gov.uk and our Simple Energy Advice service to provide homeowners with advice for decarbonising their homes, including tailored retrofit advice in local areas.

I thank the CCC once again for its expertise and advice in producing its annual report. The Government are committed to delivering a net zero economy, and we welcome the committee's contribution to this obligation. The net zero strategy sets out a roadmap to cut emissions and create new jobs across the whole country. It comes as the UK prepares to host the UN COP26 summit next week, where the Prime Minister will lead by example and call on other world economies to set out their own domestic plans for cutting emissions. Through the strategy,

we are accelerating towards more resilient futures, towards our green recovery and towards protecting our planet for this generation and those to come.

3.56 pm

Anthony Browne: I thank everyone for what has been an excellent debate, as various other Members have commented. We clearly have a shared ambition and this afternoon's discussion has been 90% policy and only about 10% politics. It has been incredibly civilised—although I am rather worried that the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) praising me so much has completely ruined my political career before it has even begun.

I will not go through all the different points because the Minister did it so effectively and he is in charge of the policy, but I want to highlight a few things that people have said. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test rightly pointed out that power had gone down very quickly and had gone down less in other sectors. There is some rationale behind that. I wrote about electric vehicles and I test-drove them about 20 years ago. The common complaint then was that they were transferring pollution from city centres up to the valleys where the power stations were, because electricity was largely produced by coal then.

It is not any greener to drive an electric car if the electricity that powers it comes from coal. Electric vehicles and other aspects of the transportation system, such as electric trains, as well as the heat pumps that we have been talking about, can be far greener if the electricity they use is decarbonised. I do not know whether that is deliberate on the part of the Government, but decarbonising electricity first and then going to the other sectors that are more difficult to decarbonise does make a sort of sense from a climate point of view.

A couple of comments were made about airport expansion, such as by the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), and someone mentioned road expansion. The Minister said that any expansion of airports would only be compliant with our commitments to net zero, and that is absolutely right. I get very involved in road conversations in my constituency because it is a big issue locally. When cars reach net zero—when we all have fully electric cars and the production of cars is carbon-neutral as well, which if we decarbonise industry will happen—having more cars driving around will not have any impact on climate change. I realise that that is some way off and that congestion would then be more of an issue, so the different rationales for adjusting cars, airports or whatever will be different. I think net zero aviation is a very long way away.

One thing that I did not touch on, but which the Minister and others did, is the economic opportunity. I have been an economics correspondent, I am on the

Treasury Committee, and I used to run the British Bankers Association. I focus very closely on economic issues and I have become more convinced that all the talk about green jobs is not just greenwashing but is actually genuine. There really are economic opportunities for us, particularly if we become a world leader in sectors ahead of other countries. We have been a bit behind on heat pumps so far, but if we make the progress that I hope we will make, it will create an industry that we can start exporting to other countries a lot more. We talked about that when we debated carbon capture, utilisation and storage yesterday. There is a huge economic opportunity in terms of exports.

We have had various discussions on nuclear. There was a bit of disagreement—some of us like nuclear, but some of us do not. I want to share a little observation. I went to Chernobyl village once—again, it was about 20 years ago. I went with the United Nations, which had done an investigation of the long-term health consequences of Chernobyl and concluded that they were absolutely minimal. From memory, I think about 40 people died of acute radiation sickness at the time of the explosion in Chernobyl, but most of the other health consequences were because of other factors. About 30,000 people were moved out of Pripjat, which is the town near Chernobyl. They were moved to other parts of Ukraine, without jobs and communities. A lot of them became alcoholic and depressed, and they died of alcoholism rather than the impacts of Chernobyl.

There have been a lot of scary stories about nuclear, but it is one of the safest forms of power. I will quote some figures—these are measured by deaths per terawatt hours, which is a huge amount of energy produced. Taking into account all factors, such as air pollution, deaths in production and so on, coal is 24.6 deaths per terawatt hour, oil is 18.4, biomass is 4.6, gas is 2.8 and nuclear is 0.07, and that includes all the deaths in Fukushima and Chernobyl.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are summing up now.

Anthony Browne: I will wind up by saying that nuclear is very safe and we do not need to worry about it. It has been an excellent debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the UK's Climate Progress: the Committee on Climate Change's 2021 Progress Report.

4.2 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 21 October 2021

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Development Consent Application under Planning Act 2008: AQUIND Ltd

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): This statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by AQUIND Ltd for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of the UK elements of a 2,000MW bi-directional subsea electrical power interconnector between Normandy in France and Lovedean in Hampshire.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it. The original deadline for the decision on the AQUIND interconnector application was 8 September 2021. This deadline was previously extended to 21 October 2021.

I have decided to set a new deadline of no later than 21 January 2022 for deciding this application. Following receipt of the report from the examining authority, I required clarification from the applicant on several issues. Interested parties were given the opportunity to comment on the applicant's response. I have decided that further work is necessary to consider the application in detail including whether further information is required, and this requires an extension to the deadline.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS348]

CABINET OFFICE

Public Appointments Data Report 2021

The Minister without Portfolio (Nigel Adams): My noble Friend, the Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, Lord True CBE, has today made the following written statement:

I am pleased to announce the publication of the public appointments data report 2021 and will today be depositing a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

The public appointments data report provides a breakdown of the diversity of public appointees who were in roles covered by the governance code on public appointments on 31 March 2021, and those appointed to such roles between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. The latter data is a subset of the information published in the Commissioner for Public Appointments' annual report.

[HCWS347]

DEFENCE

Service Complaints Ombudsman Annual Report 2020

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): The MOD'S formal response to the Service Complaints Ombudsman's (SCO) annual report for 2020 on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the service complaints system has today been placed in the Library of the House.

The ombudsman's report assessed the fifth year of operation of the reformed service complaints system which was implemented on 1 January 2016 and the work of her office in 2020. The response sets out MOD's comments and approach to each of the ombudsman's observations that she has made and includes a summary of our position on recommendations made in previous annual reports.

The MOD values the strong independent oversight that the ombudsman brings to the service complaints process, and remains committed to having a system in which our personnel can have confidence. This will include progressing outstanding recommendations and observations, together with improvements identified in Air Marshal Wigston's report in April 2019 on inappropriate behaviours.

[HCWS340]

Sir Richard Henriques Review

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): It is vital for UK Defence that our service justice system has the most up-to-date framework, skills and processes in place to deal with all allegations of offending. At the heart of the service justice system must be robust, independent, and trusted investigation processes that have the confidence of service personnel and the international community. It is for this reason, that on 13 October 2020, I announced a review by Sir Richard Henriques to examine investigative and prosecutorial processes for dealing with allegations of offences on overseas operations and improve the quality of investigations and their outcomes.

The review was to build upon but not reopen the recommendations of the service justice system review by HH Shaun Lyons and Sir Jon Murphy. The review was to be forward looking and, whilst drawing on insights from the handling of allegations from recent operations, was not to reconsider past investigative or prosecutorial decisions or reopen historical cases.

I am pleased today to publish that report. I am very grateful for the comprehensive and considered work Sir Richard has undertaken and I particularly welcome his recognition of the need for a separate system of military justice. With the improvements which will flow from his recommendations we can be confident it will be a more efficient and effective system for the accused and for victims.

Sir Richard's report contains 64 recommendations, approximately a third of which are focused on taking forward the establishment of a defence serious crime unit, which was originally proposed in the earlier Lyons/Murphy review of the service justice system. There are also operations-related recommendations (improved

training, detention processes and record-keeping), recommendations for non-statutory protocols between the service police, the Service Prosecuting Authority and the judge advocate general relating to the investigation of allegations against UK forces of unlawful killing and ill-treatment in the context of overseas operations, recommendations for improving the technical/IT systems supporting the service courts, and recommendations relating to summary hearings. I particularly welcome Sir Richard's support of the provisions in the current Armed Forces Bill to retain concurrent jurisdiction, and that the creation of the defence serious crime unit will help drive up conviction rates for serious offences.

We have considered Sir Richard's recommendations carefully, and will be taking forward the work in the following ways:

The new defence serious crime unit is key to meeting our commitment to further strengthen the service justice system. The defence serious crime unit will brigade the investigative capability for serious offending of the existing three service police forces. Under the leadership of a new provost marshal for serious crime, it will be instrumental in ensuring our service police are fully capable of meeting the challenges faced by the service justice system now and in the years ahead. I have therefore prioritised this work. The Government will be bringing forward amendments to the Armed Forces Bill to implement the recommendations on this topic which require primary legislation at this stage. These amendments will ensure that the new provost marshal will have all of the legal powers and responsibilities of the existing provost marshals; and in particular, that the new provost marshal will be responsible for guaranteeing the independence of investigations conducted by the new unit.

In respect of the recommendations which draw on the work of former judge advocate general His Honour Jeffrey Blackett and Lord Thomas of Gresford for the creation of a non-statutory protocol about the handling of serious allegations arising in the context of overseas operations, the Government believe these are matters for the independent service police, the Service Prosecuting Authority and the judge advocate general to consider in the first instance.

Work on implementing four other recommendations is also expected to be taken forward over the coming months. These will amend standard operating procedures to ensure that service police are informed with minimum delay of reportable offences, establish a serious incident board within the permanent joint headquarters, create or upgrade an operational record keeping system, and adopt a uniform approach in respect of training of service legal personnel prior to their posting to the Service Prosecuting Authority.

The remaining recommendations including legal support to personnel, improved technology/IT for the service courts and improvements to the summary hearing process, raise wider implications relating to policy, legal and resourcing issues. Those will be considered further by the Department over the coming months. The goal will be to ensure that the recommendations dovetail with our overarching intent to maintain operational effectiveness, including the swift delivery of fair and efficient justice for victims and offenders. Where appropriate and necessary, legislation will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows. I will update the House in due course.

I am confident that this review—along with the earlier service justice system review—sets out a template for the service justice system for the future. As I have set out above, where possible we are seeking to implement the most important of the recommendations as quickly as possible; and we are committing to progress the rest in the way I have described. The Government believe that the recommendations by Sir Richard will significantly improve the quality of investigations, will be fully compliant

with the requirements in the European convention on human rights and will help improve service to victims of crime within the forces.

A copy of Sir Richard's report will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS349]

EDUCATION

Higher Education Student Finance

The Minister for Further and Higher Education (Michelle Donelan): I am announcing details of student finance arrangements for higher education students undertaking a course of study in the 2022-23 academic year starting on 1 August 2022.

The Government announced in the "Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding" in January that maximum tuition fees would be frozen for a further academic year to deliver better value for students and to keep the cost of higher education under control.

I can confirm today that maximum tuition fees for the 2022-23 academic year in England will be maintained at the levels that apply in the 2021-22 academic year, the fifth year in succession that fees have been frozen. This means that the maximum level of tuition fees for a standard full-time course will remain at £9,250 for the 2022-23 academic year.

Maximum undergraduate loans for living costs will be increased by forecast inflation (2.3%) in 2022-23. And the same increase will apply to maximum disabled students' allowance for students with disabilities undertaking full-time and part-time undergraduate courses in 2022-23. Maximum grants for students with child or adult dependants who are attending full-time undergraduate courses will also increase by forecast inflation in 2022-23.

We are also increasing support for students undertaking postgraduate courses in 2022-23. Maximum loans for students starting master's degree and doctoral degree courses from 1 August 2022 onwards will be increased by forecast inflation (2.3%) in 2022-23. And the same increase will apply to the maximum disabled students' allowance for postgraduate students with disabilities in 2022-23.

I am confirming today that current and former employees of the UK Government and their family members that have been relocated from Afghanistan to the UK under the Home Office's relocation and assistance scheme will qualify for student support and home fee status in relation to new higher education courses from 1 August 2022 onwards if they have been resident in the UK and islands since the grant of such leave. They will also qualify for advanced learner loans for further education courses. Students who are in this category will not need to demonstrate three years' ordinary residence in the UK and islands before the start of a course.

I am also confirming today that home fee status and tuition fee loans will be extended to the family members of all persons settled in the UK, subject to three years residence in the UK and islands immediately before the start of the course. Currently only the family members of UK nationals are eligible under this residency category.

I am announcing today that persons who have settled status on arrival in the UK, who come to the UK from specified British overseas territories and who are starting full-time and part-time undergraduate courses in 2022-23 will be eligible for tuition fee loans. To qualify, persons resident in the British overseas territories will need to satisfy the three-year ordinary residence requirement in the UK, islands or specified British overseas territories. Eligible persons in Gibraltar may continue to satisfy the three-year ordinary residence requirement in the UK, Gibraltar, the EEA or Switzerland to qualify for student support for courses starting on or before 31 December 2027.

UK nationals and their family members in the British overseas territories already benefit from access to home fee status if they meet the residency requirement of three years in the UK, islands and British overseas territories immediately before the start of the course. Family members of all persons settled when in the UK will now have access to home fee status.

Corresponding changes will be made in respect of students in the above categories who are starting postgraduate master's degree courses and postgraduate doctoral degree courses in 2022-23 who will qualify for postgraduate loans and those starting further education courses in 2022-23 who will qualify for advanced learner loans.

The changes set out above demonstrate our commitment to supporting economic development in the British overseas territories and enabling those who wish to study at one of our world-class education providers to be able to do so.

Further details of the student support package for 2022-23 are set out in the document available as an attachment online: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-10-21/HCWS339>.

I expect to lay regulations implementing changes to student finance for undergraduates and postgraduates for 2022-23 in November. These regulations will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

The Government continue to consider the recommendations made by the Augar panel carefully. We plan to set out a full response to the review of post-18 education and funding in due course.

[HCWS339]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (1 June 2021 to 31 August 2021)

The Minister for Security and Borders (Damian Hinds): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIM) Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of her TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 31 August 2021)	5
Number of new TPIM notices served (during this period)	1
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 31 August 2021)	5
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	1

TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	0
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	4
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	1
The number of subjects relocated under TPIM legislation (during this the reporting period)	3

On 2 June 2021 a former TPIM subject was sentenced to an 18 month community order having pleaded guilty to a breach of the association measure of the TPIM notice.

The TPIM review group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. Second quarter TRG meetings were held throughout September 2021.

[HCWS343]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Response to Trade and Agriculture Commission Report and Launch of New TAC

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): In July 2020 the Government established a Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) to advise the Government on trade policies that will secure opportunities for UK farmers while ensuring the sector remains competitive and making sure that animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined. The TAC fulfilled its remit and reported in March 2021. Today, the Government have published a response to the TAC's advisory report, having carefully considered the recommendations detailed within it.

The Government recognise the key principles behind these recommendations which have been instrumental in establishing an ambitious framework for our trade policy development. Our bold approach will deliver world-class trade deals while protecting our domestic interests.

The response outlines a commitment to maintaining high animal welfare and environmental standards for future trade agreements. The UK will continue to use its influence in the international sphere to push for improved environmental and animal welfare, food safety, human rights and labour standards.

The Government's response builds on the steps already taken to deliver for UK farmers, food producers and consumers as an independent trading nation. Earlier this year, the highly successful Open Doors campaign was launched to help the industry seize new opportunities through trade agreements with priority markets.

The Government are also pleased to announce the launch of the new Trade and Agriculture Commission, chaired by Professor Lorand Bartels. As an international trade lawyer and academic, Professor Bartels will bring a wealth of expertise and experience to the role. The new commission will fulfil a different purpose to that of the original TAC, in line with the provisions debated and agreed by Parliament during the passage of the Trade Act 2021. The new TAC will bring together experts in a number of relevant fields such as animal and plant health, animal welfare, the environment and trade policy. It will scrutinise the UK's new free trade agreements and assess whether they are consistent with

the maintenance of UK levels of statutory protection in relation to: animal and plant health; animal welfare; and the environment. Its reports will be published and will make a vital contribution to Parliament's understanding of the UK's new trade agreements, helping to ensure effective scrutiny and demonstrating the Government's commitment to transparency.

A copy of the Government's response to the original Trade and Agriculture Commission report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and has been published on gov.uk.

[HCWS338]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Reformed Annual Electoral Registration Canvass

The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Kemi Badenoch): In 2020, the Government brought in changes to the way in which the annual electoral registration canvass is conducted, streamlining a previously outdated and cumbersome process. Reform of the annual canvass is part of the Government's drive to create a more efficient registration system; make the process clear and simple for citizens; and give electoral registration officers (EROs) more discretion, while maintaining completeness and accuracy of the registers.

The success of the canvass reform is clearly demonstrated by research conducted by the Cabinet Office, which I have today published on gov.uk and deposited in the Library of both Houses. As part of the modern electoral registration programme, the first stage of evaluation of the reformed annual canvass was conducted in 2020 and 2021 through surveys and interviews with EROs and electoral administrators. This research focused in particular on citizen and ERO experiences of the canvass, as well as giving some indication of the impact of canvass reform on completeness and accuracy of the register, and efficiencies in the registration system.

This research clearly shows a major improvement over the pre-reform canvass, with an increase across the board in satisfaction of EROs and administrators in the reformed system, and largely positive impressions from participants regarding the changed processes.

This improvement in satisfaction demonstrates how the Government successfully work with the electoral sector to develop effective policies, and also support the sector with implementation of a programme of change.

The Government worked closely with stakeholders in the electoral sector during the development and implementation of this change, but while reform was welcomed by electoral administrators and the Electoral Commission, it also faced opposition, with some claiming the changes would disenfranchise some electors. These fears have proven to be unfounded, as is often the case with changes to electoral systems.

I note that concerns were previously expressed around the Government's introduction of individual electoral registration in 2014, and with the decision to hold polls earlier this year during the covid-19 pandemic; both of which subsequently proved successful. Evidence has shown that the individual system drives up registration figures and enhances the accuracy of the registers, and the independent Electoral Commission's evaluation of the

May 21 polls showed that people had high levels of satisfaction with the polls and that the challenges of covid-19 did not stop voters taking part.

Along with the previous introduction of individual electoral registration and the measures in the Elections Bill, this reform of the annual canvass is a further example of the improvements that the Government are making to registration and elections in the UK. This Government are committed to ensuring our democracy is secure, fair, modern and transparent and our electoral system is kept up to date for our age.

[HCWS341]

Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Report

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): Today the UK Government published the second quarterly report of our engagement with the devolved Administrations on the gov.uk page for intergovernmental relations (IGR). This report has also been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report aims to be useful, accessible, and engaging to a broad audience, recognising the public interest in how the UK Government and the devolved Administrations work together to deliver outcomes for all citizens across the UK. It reflects the Government's continued commitment to increased transparency of IGR and effective scrutiny of the UK Government's role in intergovernmental meetings.

Our second quarterly report on IGR provides information on intergovernmental meetings across the UK Government with counterparts in the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive between 1 March and 30 June 2021. It covers an important period of ministerial engagement following the parliamentary elections in Scotland and Wales, and continued joint working as we focus on the UK's covid-19 response and recovery.

[HCWS342]

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Today I am publishing an updated Cabinet Committee list. I have placed a copy of the new list in the Library in both Houses.

[HCWS345]

TRANSPORT

Planning Update

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): I have been asked by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to make this written ministerial statement. This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadlines for decisions on the following two applications made under the Planning Act as indicated below to allow for further consideration of environmental matters:

M25 junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange: for the proposed development by National Highways which would authorise a number of improvements to the junction between the M25

and the A3. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 12 October 2020 and the current deadline for a decision was 12 November, having been extended from 12 January 2021 to 12 May 2021 and then to 12 November 2021. The deadline is now extended to 12 May 2022;

M54 to M6 link road: for the proposed development by National Highways which would authorise a link road between junction 1 of the M54, junction 11 of the M6 and the A460 to Cannock. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 21 July 2020 and the current deadline for a decision was 21 October 2021. The deadline is now extended to 21 April 2022.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make his decision within three months of receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the Houses of Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The Department will also endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above wherever possible.

The decision to set new deadlines is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to give development consent for the above applications.

[HCWS344]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Expanding Our Services Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): On 23 March 2021, I outlined how, as part of the Government's commitment to support people back into work, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was expanding its services by introducing additional temporary jobcentres. This expansion of DWP estates is supporting our comprehensive £30 billion Plan for Jobs, helping people back into employment across Great Britain.

As of March 2021, DWP had secured 80 additional temporary jobcentres. This number has now risen to 177. DWP has been opening these temporary jobcentres to

the public gradually over the past few months and I am pleased to announce that, on 7 October, Maidstone became the 100th additional jobcentre to open to the public.

These additional, temporary, jobcentres enable DWP to continue to provide the tailored support that claimants need to get back into and progress in work. They also provide space for the 13,500+ new work coaches we have recruited since March 2020.

These new sites provide a high-quality, modern, accessible and digitally enabled environment for both colleagues and customers. Furthermore, as part of our design requirements, we are aiming to reduce the environmental impact per site, for example, by increasing the energy performance certificate rating across sites.

They will enable many more customers to be supported, with work coaches often working with employers directly and using the new premises to hold job fairs which local employers attend.

To highlight just one example, the temporary site in Barking opened in July 2021 and so far the site has hosted over 30 employer events attended by 173 employers conducting over 1000 interviews. This has resulted in 424 successful job outcomes to date, in a range of job sectors, changing the lives of some of our most vulnerable customers.

As the economy recovers we will look to close these temporary sites to ensure that we balance providing essential services for our customers with value for money for the taxpayer. If any of the new sites offer better, more suitable, accommodation than our existing offices we may look to retain them instead and I will update the House accordingly.

DWP continues to update the list of temporary jobcentres regularly on gov.uk and notified MPs of new openings and additional services which cover their constituencies including our new youth hubs.

[HCWS346]

Petition

Thursday 21 October 2021

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter

The petition of residents of the constituency of the Vale of Clwyd,

Declares that the maintenance of the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter should be the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales, Denbighshire County Council and connected public sector bodies; further that existing riparian ownership should not prevent the creation of an effective system of oversight; and further that the current ineffective management of this local waterway results in significant environmental blight.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take immediate action to ensure that a full public sector maintenance programme is introduced to manage the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —[Presented by Dr James Davies, *Official Report*, 14 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 487.]

[P002677]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow):

The Government would like to thank the petitioners for raising the issue of maintenance of the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter.

The Government do not have responsibility for operational matters, including maintenance, on the waterways as this usually sits with either individual navigation authorities who have a duty to manage and operate their waterways; or riparian landowners, who may own the banks or the bed of the river. In this case additionally the broader issue of oversight of waterways maintenance would be a devolved issue for the Welsh Government.

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Thursday 21 October 2021

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PETITION

Thursday 21 October 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	5P
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**not later than
Thursday 28 October 2021**

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