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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 16 November 2023

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

SESSIONAL RETURNS

Ordered,

That there be laid before the House Returns for Session 2022-23 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question, Allocation of Time and Programming of Bills
- (3) Sittings of the House
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business
- (5) Public Bills
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders
- (7) European Legislation, etc
- (8) Grand Committees and the Regional Affairs Committee
- (9) Panel of Chairs
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Artificial Intelligence: Creative Sector

1. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of AI on the creative sector. [900120]

4. **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of AI on under-represented groups in the creative industries. [900124]

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Sir John Whittingdale): I will endeavour to be succinct. AI offers huge benefits and opportunities to the creative sector, but it also brings challenges. The Government have engaged extensively with the creative industries and others about it and will continue to do so.

Stuart C. McDonald: I thank the Minister for his succinct response, but, as he knows, the Select Committee has called for the Government to abandon the proposed

copyright exemptions for text and data mining, which the chief executive officer of UK Music succinctly described as a

“green light to music laundering”.

Can the Minister confirm that the Government will not undermine artists and musicians by exempting AI data mining from copyright restrictions?

Sir John Whittingdale: As the hon. Gentleman is probably aware, there are ongoing discussions between creative rights owners and the platforms and others through the Intellectual Property Office, but it has made clear that, unless permitted under licence or on exception, making copies under text and data mining will constitute copyright infringement.

Alex Sobel: Does the Minister agree that the nature of AI systems is such that, when they are trained on creative works, both conscious and unconscious biases in music, films and art against certain groups in our society will be reinforced in generative outputs? The Government are seeking a code of conduct on copyright and AI; will they use this opportunity to address that issue and ensure that AI companies take responsibility for protecting against that type of harm? Is he considering an AI Bill, even though it was not announced in the King's Speech?

Sir John Whittingdale: There is a great deal of work going on around AI to develop a framework of regulation, as was originally set out in the White Paper. The hon. Gentleman's point about algorithmic bias is a serious one; it is being studied by the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, and obviously we will look very carefully at that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): People working in the creative industries have been completely let down by the Tories, including on real concerns about the impact of AI. The Government have not responded to the consultation on their own AI White Paper or the report on AI and the creative industries. They have not got to grips with the issue at all. Creative people need to know whether they will be properly rewarded for their incredible talents, now and in the future. When will the Government set out a proper plan to protect creators?

Sir John Whittingdale: The hon. Lady is new to her role and so may have missed the creative sector vision, which was published about six months ago and set out an investment totalling some £50 billion going into the creative industries over the next five years. A great deal of work is taking place on the impact of AI on creative industries, and we are hoping to say more about that before the end of the year.

Thangam Debbonaire: That is just not good enough. Thanks to the resilience and hard work of those in the creative industries, they are growing faster than many others, but it is people who make the best joy and the best culture, not AI. We are all better off when we draw on everyone's talents. That is how we grow the creative industries—with people from more diverse backgrounds in more jobs. Tackling AI is a fundamental part of that.

To pick an example for the Minister, talent in the north represents just 15% of employment in the creative industries under the Tories, so what are the Government doing to protect and increase that in the age of AI?

Sir John Whittingdale: With the Secretary of State, I was able to spend Monday in Manchester for the creative industries conference, where we met representatives from right across the sectors, including those from the AI sector. AI is already benefiting the creative industries to a considerable amount and represents real opportunities for them.

Horseracing

2. **Mr Louie French** (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support the horseracing sector. [900122]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): Horseracing is an integral part of British sporting culture, and we recognise the significant contribution the sport makes to the economy. We have commenced the review of the horserace betting levy, to commit to a sustainable future for racing, and the British Horseracing Authority's 2024 fixture list for racing shows an estimated £90 million improvement to British racing's finances until 2028.

Mr French: My right hon. Friend will be aware that many racegoers and people who work in a variety of jobs across the sector are concerned that increased affordability checks could have a detrimental impact on British horseracing. What assurances can he provide that affordability checks will not be intrusive and that millions of hard-working Brits will still be free to safely enjoy the great British tradition of a day at the races?

Stuart Andrew: I know that my hon. Friend has a keen interest in this area. We absolutely recognise the relationship between betting and racing, and have no intention of over-regulating. In fact, it is the current system that is inconsistent, and we want to bring some uniformity to it. We have had several meetings with racing stakeholders, the gambling industry and the Gambling Commission this week. We have been very clear that we will not mandate checks until we are confident that they are frictionless and that the majority of those who enjoy gambling safely can continue to do so, while protecting those who may enter gambling harm.

Mr Speaker: A safe bet—Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response. The terrible weather conditions in the last three or four weeks has had an impact on the horseracing sector. The races at Down Royal, on the edge of my constituency, were cancelled because the flooding was of biblical proportions. Horseracing is very important to my constituents, and many people are involved in it. That had an impact on their ability to attend. Has the Minister had discussions with other Departments to ensure that any help that can be given to the horseracing sector for those races that were lost is given?

Stuart Andrew: First, may I say what a pleasure it was to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency a few weeks ago? He is asking if I can do something about the weather; I wish I could. I understand the impact it might have. I would be happy to discuss any specific issues relating to the racecourse he mentioned, and to see whether I can talk to colleagues in other Departments about that.

Tourism Industry: Devon and Cornwall

3. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on Government support for the tourism industry in Devon and Cornwall. [900123]

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Sir John Whittingdale): I was pleased to visit south Devon in August and to meet members of the Great South West tourism partnership. I am also pleased that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have recently been accredited as a local visitor economy partnership and that Devon is working with VisitEngland towards potential accreditation.

Kevin Foster: As the Minister knows, the tourism sector in our region is iconic, but any rises in business rate bills that local hospitality businesses are required to pay could see many struggle. While it is for the Chancellor to set out tax changes, can he outline what representations he is making to the Chancellor to freeze the business rate multiplier and extend the 75% relief for hospitality for a further year?

Sir John Whittingdale: I discussed a range of issues affecting tourism in Devon with the Great South West tourism partnership. We covered a lot of ground, and I know that those issues are of great importance to the tourism sector. Of course, we are in regular dialogue with the Treasury, but it is a matter for the Chancellor, as my hon. Friend says.

Journalists in Conflict Zones

5. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on support for journalists working in conflict zones. [900125]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): Journalists in conflict zones are putting their lives on the line to enable us to benefit from their accurate reporting. My thoughts are with all of them, and with the families and friends of those who have unfortunately lost their lives. I have raised support for journalists in conflict zones with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer and for her understanding of the issue. As so many news outlets are cutting budgets, the reliance on freelancers reporting from conflict zones grows. Such reporters do not have a big corporate behind them to pay for their training, their personal protective equipment and then their support and counselling when they come back. A lot of good work is done here by the Rory Peck Trust, but it is desperately short of

resources. Will she speak to her colleagues in Government to see what more can be done to support freelancers through better funding for the Rory Peck Trust?

Lucy Frazer: I am happy to speak to my colleagues in Government to understand how we can further support journalists. We have led a great deal of action recently and over a number of years to support journalists both here and abroad, and we have set up a number of funds and taskforces to support them.

Independent Football Regulator

6. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): When she plans to appoint an independent football regulator. [900126]

9. **Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Lab): What her planned timetable is for establishing an independent regulator for English football. [900130]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): The Government remain committed to putting fans at the heart of football and to ensuring that the game has a sustainable financial future. The football governance Bill was included in the King's Speech, and we intend to work closely with the Football Association, the leagues and fan associations to build the best independent regulator possible.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. My understanding is that while negotiations are taking place between the Premier League and the English Football League, there has not yet been agreement on redistribution of money. Is there anything she can do to bring the two sides together so that progress can be made on that very important issue?

Lucy Frazer: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. It is really important that football comes to a deal in relation to distributions. I support him in encouraging the football associations to do so, and I continue to urge them to reach an agreement in that area. Although our preference is a football-led solution, given the importance of distributions to financial sustainability, the independent football regulator will have targeted statutory powers to intervene on financial distributions as a last resort, if necessary. If football fails to deliver a solution, the regulator will deliver one.

Christian Wakeford: Like many people across the House, I love football—I always have done. It is more than just a game; it is the social fabric that runs through communities, and it can make our weekends or break them—but enough about United's current form. The England manager, Gareth Southgate, has warned that the regulator is

“another VAR waiting to happen”,

with the Government possibly looking to solve complicated questions with simple answers. Will the Secretary of State explain how we will get this right, and will she ensure that the regulator is implemented swiftly, so that more clubs do not go the way of Bury in the meantime?

Lucy Frazer: I understand the hon. Member's concerns: Bury has suffered in the past, as have many other clubs across the country. That is why we are bringing in a

regulator. I have had a number of conversations with the leagues, my parliamentary colleagues and fans to make sure that we get the regulation right. We committed in our manifesto to bring forward a fan-led review White Paper. We have done so, and we are at a very advanced stage, having announced the football governance Bill in the King's Speech. I note that Labour did nothing in its 13 years in office.

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

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): The inclusion of football governance in the King's Speech is very welcome. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm what discussions she has had with the FA on whether the independent regulator will include women's football, and when the Government intend to publish their response to the Carney review?

Lucy Frazer: I have regular discussions with the FA—indeed, I met its chair yesterday. At the moment, the regulator will cover the men's game, but I also met Karen Carney a week or so ago. Her review is extremely important to women's football and women's sport, and I very much look forward to publishing our response to that report, which we will do very shortly.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): There was concern that the Premier League made very late representations and tried to water down the powers of the regulator. Will the Secretary of State say what the Government's response to that intervention by the Premier League was?

Lucy Frazer: We want to ensure that we get the regulator right. It is essential that we protect fans and bring forward the legislation that the Labour party failed to bring forward. The legislation will strike absolutely the right balance between protecting fans and ensuring that our premier league and our football remain a competitive, world-class sport across the globe.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Football clubs are more than businesses; they are at the heart of communities up and down the country, but too many clubs are being pushed to the brink, leaving fans from Scunthorpe to Reading worried that their club might be damaged beyond repair by the time a regulator is brought in. Will the Secretary of State update us on what immediate action and interim measures the Department is taking to ensure that an independent regulator for football is ready to go as soon as new legislation is passed?

Lucy Frazer: We are taking absolutely those measures: we are putting in place a shadow regulator, and we have advertised for the appointment of the regulator's chief operating officer. We want to ensure that as soon as the legislation is on the books, everything is ready so that it can come into force as soon as possible.

I notice that the Football Task Force was set up in 1997 by the incoming Labour Government to look at systemic issues in football and make recommendations to Ministers on how to address them. However, despite a number of reports identifying significant failings in the sport, a member of that taskforce's working group reported that the Labour Government made it clear that they could not, and would not, deliver a statutory regulator. This Government are bringing that regulator in.

Commercial Radio and Television

7. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support commercial radio and television in the context of the development of new transmission platforms. [900127]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): I note that my hon. Friend has in the past been a big star on the airwaves himself. Last week, the Government introduced the Media Bill into Parliament. The Bill will ensure that our world-leading TV and radio sectors are able to compete in the new digital world, so that they can continue to produce great content for the audiences of the future.

Michael Fabricant: If I were to say, “Hey, Siri, can I have GB News radio?” or “Alexa, play GB News radio”—[*Interruption.*] Of course I would say GB News radio. It is the most successful news channel now, pulling in a bigger audience at most times of the day than either the BBC News channel or Sky—TalkTV cannot even be measured. Anyway, I am going off the subject.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to help you, because if you do not get to the question, you will not be asking it. Come on!

Michael Fabricant: My question is: what provisions are in place, if any, to ensure that if I do say those things, I get GB News radio, not another channel, and I am not charged for it?

Mr Speaker: He’ll be asking for Radio Caroline next. [*Laughter.*]

Lucy Frazer: The measures in the Media Bill will protect the position of radio in relation to voice-activated smart speakers, ensuring that listeners can find their favourite radio stations on request. In particular, when a listener requests a specific station, they should receive that station.

Music Education

8. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for Education to increase the uptake of music among children. [900129]

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Sir John Whittingdale): In June 2022, we published the new national plan for music education, which aims to level up music opportunities for all children and young people regardless of circumstance, needs or geography. Since publication, we have worked with the Department for Education to progress delivery of the music hub investment programme and the music progression fund.

Wera Hobhouse: I recently welcomed Bath young carers from the Bath Philharmonia to perform music in Parliament, and it was a wonderful evening. Sadly, too few young people have the opportunity to learn an instrument, or to perform or enjoy music, and the number of GCSE music entrants has fallen by 12.5%. The Minister mentioned the new national plan for music education. Will he update us on how many schools have implemented that plan, and will we get regular updates about any increase in the number of GCSE music entrants?

Sir John Whittingdale: I am sorry that I was unable to hear the visiting group from the hon. Lady’s constituency, but I am delighted that it came. As I have said, we are investing £25 million in the provision of musical instruments through music hubs. I can tell her that the proportion of pupils studying for a music qualification at key stage 4 over the past years has remained stable at about 7% to 8%.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I have to say that the Bath young carers played wonderfully, and I really enjoyed listening to them.

Ofsted recently stated that there remains a “divide between children and young people whose families can afford to pay for music tuition and those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.”

I share the concern just expressed about the impact this is having. The money promised for musical instruments in June 2022, which the Minister has just mentioned, has still not been distributed to schools, and it now sounds as though that money is not going to arrive until autumn 2024. Will that delay not just mean that more children are not able to learn to play an instrument? What action can the Minister take to speed it up?

Sir John Whittingdale: I can tell the hon. Lady that the Government remain committed to investment through the music hub investment programme, and I am happy to give her a specific answer to the question she raises about the allocation of that money in writing. The Government are working very closely with the DFE on this, and we also look forward to producing a cultural education plan in early 2024.

UEFA Euro 2028

10. **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): What steps she is taking to help support preparations for UEFA Euro 2028. [900133]

13. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps she is taking to help support preparations for UEFA Euro 2028. [900136]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): The Government are delighted that the UK and Ireland have secured the right to host Euro 2028. This will be the biggest joint event our islands have ever hosted, building on our world-leading track record of delivering major sporting events and leaving a lasting legacy for communities right across the United Kingdom.

Eddie Hughes: I am delighted to have to declare an interest, because my cousin, Ray Reidy, has just been appointed interim chief financial officer at Aston Villa. As an Aston Villa fan myself, I know how difficult it is to get away from a game using Witton train station. Will the Minister join me, Andy Street and the combined authority, in working to develop the capacity of Witton train station in advance of that stadium being used for the Euros in 2028?

Mr Speaker: The Minister might want to pass that question on to a Transport Minister!

Stuart Andrew: We in DCMS are always happy to try to deliver what our colleagues want, and I am delighted that Villa Park is a great venue and has exciting plans. Birmingham and the west midlands region has benefited from significant investment as part of the Commonwealth games, but my hon. Friend is right to say that we will be working with partners right across Government, and in other organisations, to ensure that Euro 2028 is one of the most exciting events we have seen in this country.

Bob Blackman: I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend has been to Villa Park, but some of us may differ on its condition. We will leave it to Gareth Southgate to prepare the team to go one step further and win the championship when it comes around, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that the security and travel arrangements, and most importantly the ticketing arrangements, maximise the capability of people to enjoy our beautiful game?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. In my role I get the great opportunity to go to many exciting events—

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Which is your favourite?

Stuart Andrew: Well, Eurovision of course. I always make sure that I take the opportunity to meet fans and see the experience that they are having at these events, so that we learn from them and ensure that we are addressing any issues that come up. That is why we will be working with all operational partners to ensure that every match is a good one for people to enjoy.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): St James' Park in the heart of Newcastle will be welcoming European football fans as part of Euro 2028, and we are very proud of that. Following the 2012 Olympics, sports participation did not increase. Will the Minister set out what the Government will do to ensure that the legacy of Euro 2028 is increased participation across Newcastle?

Stuart Andrew: The hon. Lady raises an important point. Legacy is incredibly important to me. That is why we have been giving hundreds of millions of pounds to improve on and build new grassroots sports facilities, so that there are plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy the things they want to do that are inspired by tournaments just like Euro 2028.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): This should be an opportunity for fans to celebrate and enjoy. I remember the 1996 Euros, when the Danish fans came to Sheffield and drank the city dry, without any problems or disorder whatsoever. Will the Minister give two commitments? First, will he engage with the Football Supporters' Association in full planning for this? It needs to be involved because it has really good ideas and experience. Secondly, will he talk to the authorities about ticket pricing, so that those on low incomes, and particularly children, can get to the games and enjoy the events?

Stuart Andrew: I absolutely commit to engage with the Football Supporters' Association. I also met fans ahead of the European championship finals in Istanbul this year. The hon. Gentleman is right, and there are lots

of issues for us to discuss. We are in constant discussions with the likes of UEFA, for example, to which I will happily make those representations.

EU Exit: Creative Industries in Scotland

11. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Whether she has had recent discussions with representatives of the creative industries in Scotland on the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on those industries. [900134]

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (**Sir John Whittingdale**): I and my officials regularly meet representatives of the creative industries in Scotland, and we were pleased to be joined by representatives from Creative Scotland, the Scottish Government and the Creative Industries Council earlier this week. We will continue to work closely with colleagues in Scotland to ensure that the UK's creative industries remain world leading following the UK's exit from the European Union.

Gavin Newlands: Notwithstanding the Minister's answer, polling by the Independent Society of Musicians has shown that almost half of musicians in the music industry have had less work in the EU post Brexit, and 40% have had to cancel work in the EU due to the increased cost of travelling and working in the EU. How can the Minister continue to pretend that Brexit has not harmed musicians, when the costs are so enormous and have been explained to this Government many, many times?

Sir John Whittingdale: We are continuing to work to make it easier for musicians from this country to tour in Europe, and we have managed to establish arrangements with 24 out of 27 member states that now allow visa and work permit-free routes for UK performers for short-term touring. We continue to engage in discussions with countries individually to make further improvements.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The post-Brexit tightening of immigration rules and the Brexit-caused cost of living crisis are having a disproportionate impact on the creative sector, as the UK Government continue to squeeze public services. In advance of the autumn statement next week, what representations are the Secretary of State and the Department making to the Chancellor to ensure that the creative sector is adequately funded and protected, so that Scotland can receive the Barnett consequential from that in order to continue to support our wonderful and, as the Minister says, world-leading creative industry?

Sir John Whittingdale: The Chancellor has been very generous to the creative industries and I hope that he will continue to be so. However, I would point out to the hon. Lady that Creative Scotland benefits from a grant in aid budget of around £63 million, and I would have thought that she might welcome the fact that in the last March Budget the UK Government announced £8.6 million in support for two of Edinburgh's world-leading festivals.

Topical Questions

T1. [900138] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): May I first welcome the new Secretary of State to her place—[*Interruption.*] I mean the shadow Secretary of State. I also welcome all the new Ministers: it is a pleasure to work with them and I look forward to doing so over the coming months.

Since we last met for questions, my Department has been busy delivering on the priorities of the Government. On Monday, the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and I met more than 150 businesses in Manchester to ensure that we build the creative industries not just in London but across the north. We made an announcement to drive growth in our creative industries with more than £10 million to scale up hundreds of creative industry businesses.

We are protecting and upholding media freedom, with an updated national action plan for the safety of journalists, and a new taskforce to tackle the misuse of strategic lawsuits against public participation by individuals who want to muzzle the press. As well as that, we are creating opportunities across the UK—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we have only eight minutes for topicals and I really am struggling to get everyone in. I call Gavin Newlands.

Gavin Newlands: Tonight, Scotland will play what amounts to a dead rubber because we have qualified for the Euros with two games to spare. It is an unusual feeling for us and we do not know quite what to do. Generations of young Scottish football fans, unlike their English and Welsh counterparts, are unable to see their national football team on free-to-air television. Scotland is one of only seven out of 55 UEFA countries where the national team is hidden behind a paywall. In these times when families are really struggling, does the Secretary of State think that is fair in principle?

Lucy Frazer: I did not catch all of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I think he asked about broadcasting rights and Scottish teams. He needs to understand, because he raises this question from time to time, that there is a balance between audience numbers and commercial revenues for sport. As he knows, sport is devolved to the Scottish Government—

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Cameron.

T2. [900140] **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Con): Following the successful artificial intelligence summit, can my right hon. Friend update us on his conversations with the media industry to make sure that safeguards are in place while we also reap important jobs for the future?

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Sir John Whittingdale): Rapid development of AI poses major questions for many industries, including our vital press sector. We are hosting roundtables with broadcasters and news publishers to discuss the risks and opportunities of AI to journalism, and we intend to continue the conversation with the sector over the coming months.

T4. [900142] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): UK-inbound tourism has lost the equivalent of 15,000 jobs following the 83% fall in EU student groups visiting our country because of post-Brexit passport and visa

requirements. I was heartened to read in the *Financial Times* about the proposed deal that the Prime Minister wants to strike with France following his summit with President Macron. Are any other deals like that in the pipeline?

Lucy Frazer: That is an excellent deal. Of course, we would like to replicate it if that is possible.

T3. [900141] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Swim Torquay provides a vital community facility in Plainmoor, yet it missed out on funding from the Government's swimming pool support fund. Will the Minister agree to a meeting to discuss how it can still be supported to meet the essential costs that it faces?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): It is precisely because we recognise how important swimming pools are that we have this fund. We have allocated £140,000 to the Riviera International Centre in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I know that the local council is seeking funding from phase 2. I will happily arrange a meeting with colleagues and Sport England.

T5. [900143] **Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): A YMCA report last year found that £1.1 billion had been cut from youth services since 2010-11—a real-terms cut of 74%. While the Government's national youth guarantee does provide a funding injection for youth services, it is nowhere near enough to reverse those cuts, and the funding is predominantly for capital investments. Will the Secretary of State commit to providing youth services with the sustainable revenue funding that they desperately need?

Lucy Frazer: I invite the hon. Member to read a speech I gave on youth, which is a massive priority of mine. We are funding significantly through DCMS and through the National Citizen Service as well as through a number of Departments. There are Home Office funds, Justice funds, and funds through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

T6. [900144] **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): For me, as a massive Bath rugby fan, it is difficult to represent a seat in Leicestershire, what with the Tigers being there. With that said, the nice thing that brings all rugby fans together is the ability to watch the game. There is concern, though, about the governance of premiership rugby and how it is run. Could the Minister update us on where we are up to on that? I know that he has taken a special interest in trying to get that organised.

Stuart Andrew: I know that my hon. Friend has taken a keen interest in this, and he is absolutely right that we need to see improved governance. That is why we appointed two special advisers, who have been working with both the premier league and the Rugby Football Union to come up with solutions. We are having meetings with them constantly and will ensure that they progress.

T7. [900145] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Citizens across the EU now benefit from increased transparency in how big tech companies target them with adverts and propaganda

thanks to the Digital Services Act. Of course, we have missed out because of Brexit. What will the Government do to provide increased transparency and tackle bad-faith actors using big tech to target our citizens?

Sir John Whittingdale: The online advertising taskforce has come forward with a number of measures, and we are looking both to legislate in this area in due course and to introduce non-statutory measures. We are committed to protecting vulnerable people from inappropriate advertising, and to tackling fraudulent advertising.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The inclusion of five additional sports in the Los Angeles Olympics programme could provide extra medal prospects for Team GB, especially as our women are current European flag champions, the England, Scotland and Wales women's lacrosse teams are in the top 10, and we have two men and one woman in the top 10 for squash. However, to ensure success, funding for the 2028 Olympics needs to be secured before Paris next year, so what discussions is the Minister having with the new lottery provider and the Treasury to ensure that UK sport is adequately funded for those sports and others for LA28?

Stuart Andrew: I was interested to discover this morning that my hon. Friend has a horse named after her, called Commander Crouch—if anyone wants a good investment, there you go.

The UK sports investment process for Los Angeles is under way. I welcome the fact that there are these new sports, including flag football; I know that my hon. Friend is a big fan of American football. UK Sport will consider the funding for all those new sports, and I will soon have a meeting with its representatives to get an update.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Local newspapers are under threat. When the community news project was introduced in 2018 for newspapers such as the *Cambridge News*, it was widely welcomed. The project was supported by tech giant Meta, but it has now withdrawn funding. Will the Minister join me and others in calling for it to rethink its decision?

Sir John Whittingdale: I met representatives of Meta earlier in the week, and I did make clear to them the Government's disappointment at the withdrawal of the community news project. We are looking to ensure that newspapers are properly compensated by the tech giants, and measures to ensure that are contained in the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): After the tremendous success of the Commonwealth games in Birmingham in 2021, I was delighted to hear last week that our fantastic mayor Andy Street has secured a £9 million legacy fund from the Commonwealth games for communities to participate in grassroots projects. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a fantastic opportunity for organisations in constituencies such as mine and across the west midlands bid for the fund in order to promote physical and mental activities in local communities?

Stuart Andrew: My right hon. Friend is right. It is wonderful to see the legacy from the Commonwealth games. I join her in telling people to reach out and apply.

That will be coupled with the significant investment that we are putting into grassroots sports so that communities can come together and enjoy the sports they like, and improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Party Spending Limits

1. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent discussions the Committee has had with the Electoral Commission on party spending limits for elections. [900085]

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood): The Committee has not had recent discussions with the Commission on the matters raised. The Electoral Commission supports political parties to comply with their legal obligations to adhere to spending limits during an election campaign, and publishes their spending. That provides voters with transparency over the money spent by political parties during elections and assurance that there is a level playing field for all political parties.

Mr Carmichael: Public confidence in the integrity of our democracy is only harmed by the idea that somehow it can be bought by the people with the deepest pockets. Can the hon. Member assure me that the Electoral Commission understands that in setting those limits, it is a question not simply of finance and arithmetic but of the integrity of the system and that level playing field?

Cat Smith: The UK Government's proposals to increase the spending limits and donation reporting thresholds represent a significant change to the UK's political finance controls. The Commission's research shows a long-term decline in public confidence in the political finance system. Any changes to spending or reporting thresholds must be supported by rigorous analysis, including on the likely impact on public confidence and transparency. The Commission has not seen any evidence to support these changes. It is concerned that the proposals risk damaging the transparency of political donations and give significantly more scope for higher-spending parties to campaign.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Engagement with Children and Young People

2. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent progress the Church of England has made on increasing engagement with children and young people. [900086]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): My hon. Friend is right to focus on the importance of this issue. The Church of England is working hard to create a church that is younger and more diverse, doubling

the number of children and young active disciples by 2030. More than £60 million has been awarded to five dioceses to achieve that.

Bob Blackman: Recently, I had the opportunity to be at the patronal service where 12 young people from St Mary's church in Kenton and St Lawrence's church in Stanmore were confirmed in the Church of England. That demonstrates that young people are attracted to the church, but what more can my hon. Friend—and the Church—do to attract younger people to come into the church and fulfil their destiny?

Andrew Selous: I am delighted to learn about the good work at St Mary's Kenton and St Lawrence's Stanmore, where 12 young people were recently confirmed. The good news is that the £60 million is being well spent, and is producing promising results across the Church of England. We need to see a lot more of it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Whenever I was a child in the '60s—it wasn't yesterday—every child in Ballywalter attended Sunday school meetings. Today, it is a different generation. National Sunday attendance figures for under-16s have dropped below 100,000 for the first time. I understand that the Church is reaching out to young people, but perhaps we need to reach out a wee bit differently. What plans are there to do that?

Andrew Selous: As always, the hon. Gentleman is on the money. I can tell him that the Church's strategic mission and ministry investment board is doing exactly that: investing in a range of different organisations that are connecting really well with young people, often through community projects. Large numbers of them are coming to church and staying there, which is brilliant.

Lichfield Cathedral Summer School

3. **Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** If the Church Commissioners will take steps to share good practice from the work of the Lichfield cathedral summer school. [900087]

Andrew Selous: I thank my hon. Friend and the cathedral chapter at Lichfield for their warm welcome on my recent visit, which I greatly enjoyed. The Lichfield cathedral summer school is indeed an inspiration to the wider Church in supporting children, many of whom are on free school meals, to socialise and learn before the new school year begins. It has expanded with county council support and the Government's holiday activities and food programme, and it would like to operate throughout the school holidays. I warmly commend it.

Michael Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. It is the 20th anniversary of MusicShare, which started in Lichfield. Over 150 schools are engaged each year. I went to the anniversary concert in Lichfield cathedral last Saturday and saw "Noye's Fludde", which was written by Benjamin Britten. It was a spectacular occasion, with all the schoolchildren taking part. What more could Lichfield do to advise other cathedrals on how it ought to be done?

Andrew Selous: As so often, where Lichfield leads others follow. My hon. Friend is right that the choral tradition in our cathedrals is one of the glories of our

country. Lichfield's MusicShare programme has, I understand, reached 25,000 children, with participants of all ages, including people up to their 90s. That is, no doubt, why it has won a national award from *The Times Educational Supplement*.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Online Political Advertising: Regulation

4. **Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab):** What recent discussions the Committee has had with the Electoral Commission on the regulation of online political advertising before an election. [900089]

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood): The Committee has not had recent discussions with the Electoral Commission on the matters raised. The Elections Act 2022 introduced a requirement for most online political campaign material to carry a digital imprint. The Commission has said that digital imprints will improve trust and confidence in digital campaigns at future elections and referendums in the UK. It has published statutory guidance to help parties and campaigners understand and comply with this new requirement.

Justin Madders: Targeted online advertising can sometimes contain very misleading claims about Members and other politicians. Members might not even be aware that an advert has been sent out. Will the Commission look at some sort of process whereby there is a way for all adverts to be registered, so that people can check their transparency and veracity?

Cat Smith: The Commission has previously recommended that social media libraries should be a legal requirement. That would provide voters with more information about who is being targeted online, but it would be for the Government to come forward with the legislation.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Same-sex Relationships

5. **Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab):** What recent progress has been made on implementing the decisions taken by the General Synod in February 2023 on blessing same-sex relationships and relating to clergy in same-sex relationships. [900090]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): This week the General Synod agreed that the prayers of love and faith, and the pastoral guidance for their use, will be commended for use from mid-December, and also that special services of prayer and dedication using the prayers of love and faith can be authorised for a trial period before full synodical authorisation.

Mr Bradshaw: I am sure the vast majority of Members on both sides of the House will warmly welcome the outcome of Synod yesterday, and I thank the hon. Member for the role he played in conveying Parliament's views to Synod. It was very clear during the debate that there are a small number who will never, ever accept LGBT people as equals in their churches. As he knows, some parishes have stopped paying their diocesan share—effectively going on strike. Why should they continue to enjoy the benefits and privileges of being Church of England parishes?

Andrew Selous: The payments by parishes to dioceses, often known as common fund or parish share, are voluntary payments towards the cost of ministry in those parishes and in the wider Church. It is a matter for dioceses how they work with their parishes to encourage them to contribute, but I would certainly very strongly encourage every church to make a fair contribution to the costs of their ministry and, where they can, to help others in poorer areas.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I reinforce what the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) said about the general welcome in the House for the movement towards equality and fairness. We have had it on ordination; we now have it on same-sex relationships up to a point. Through my hon. Friend, I ask those who are disappointed with this movement forward to think of the pain that they have caused by resisting the change for so many people, whether by sex or orientation, over the past decades.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful, as always, to the Father of the House for his wise reflections on these matters. He is right that this has been a difficult and painful period across the Church. I very much regret that, as he does. I hope we can move forward together in love, truth and unity on these matters.

Manipur: Attacks on Churches and Christian Communities

6. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Whether the Church of England has taken steps to raise awareness of recent attacks on churches and Christian communities in Manipur. [900091]

Andrew Selous: I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief for again bringing the situation in Manipur to the House's attention. Archbishop Justin has spoken about it publicly, other bishops have contacted the Indian high commissioner, and I will shortly be visiting the high commissioner myself to talk about issues in Manipur with another hon. Member, both of us being great friends of India.

Fiona Bruce: There have been months of violence in Manipur, and that violence continues, with Christians of different ethnicities targeted—such as the mother crying after four family members were tortured, killed, mutilated and cut to pieces on 7 November. Hundreds of churches and homes have been burnt, women have been sexually abused and organised mobs attack with

impunity, allegedly using looted Government weapons. International news media from abroad find access hard. Will the Church continue to do all that it can to draw the world's attention to this situation so that those responsible can be brought to account, the violence does not spread further, and practical help can be provided in the form of security, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and compensation for those who have suffered so much?

Andrew Selous: Reflecting on those awful remarks, I would suggest that it is pretty shocking to realise what our news media do not tell us much of the time. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that the Church of England is in regular contact with the Church of North India to offer all the support we can, and that we are supporting Anglicans here in the UK who have connections with Manipur. Those who suffer in Manipur are not alone, and we will continue to walk alongside them.

Antisocial Behaviour and Drug-related Crime

7. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Whether the Church of England is taking steps to support parishes experiencing antisocial behaviour and drug-related crime in and around church buildings. [900093]

Andrew Selous: The Church of England is proud to have a presence in every part of the country, but sadly that means that our churches and clergy are sometimes targeted in unpleasant ways. Working with the police and local authorities, the Church recognises that it has a duty of care to all its staff, and it will always do everything it can to protect and assist them.

Kevin Foster: It is right that parish churches offer a beacon of hope and light to those going through the dark tunnel of addiction, reaching out the hand of Christian fellowship, but that can result in both clergy and church buildings being targeted by darker forces who see that as a threat to their trade. What further steps does my hon. Friend believe dioceses could take to ensure the personal safety of all involved?

Andrew Selous: I am extremely sorry to learn that clergy and church buildings are being targeted in this way in my hon. Friend's constituency. I thank the leadership and all the members of Paignton parish church for the inspirational work that they are doing in supporting those who are sleeping rough, and in tackling drug and alcohol addiction. That is important and necessary work, and I commend my hon. Friend for doing it. I am sure that the diocese of Exeter and Devon and Cornwall police will be able to offer further help as they undertake that challenging work.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

8. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to support asylum seekers and refugees. [900094]

Andrew Selous: The Church of England is supporting asylum seekers and refugees across the country, and our chaplaincies in Europe are providing health kits, safe places to sleep, clothes, and messages to families who have become separated.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend will know that the diocese of Gloucester has recently acquired six modular homes from a local provider. Following the Gloucester housing summit that I convened not long ago, our diocese, city council and housing association are discussing how to make this model of modular housing work effectively for people in need of temporary accommodation, including those recently granted asylum. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the diocese on its good work so far, and encourage it to make progress and put this model into practice as soon as possible, recognising that it is a new approach that could perhaps be adopted elsewhere?

Andrew Selous: I am very happy to congratulate those in the diocese of Gloucester and thank them for the pioneering work that they are doing on housing, and I also thank my hon. Friend for the important leadership role he plays locally in respect of that extremely important issue. He is right to suggest that what Gloucester is doing has a wider application for others in need of emergency housing, not just asylum seekers and refugees, vitally important though that provision is. I share his view that the need is urgent, and that we should get on with this and other similar excellent initiatives as quickly as possible.

Parish Ministry

9. **Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to support its parish ministry. [900095]

Andrew Selous: Parish ministry is at the very heart of the Church's mission. The Church Commissioners are distributing £1.2 billion between 2023 and 2025 to support our mission and ministry. This is a 30% increase on the previous three-year period, and a significant share of that funding will be distributed through dioceses to strengthen our parishes.

Nick Fletcher: What can the Church hierarchy do to remove administrative burdens from the clergy, so they can spend more time in their community spreading the best message ever told: the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Andrew Selous: I think we all recognise that, in any position of public responsibility, there comes a need for some administrative work, but I very much agree with my hon. Friend that we should be freeing up our clergy and parish staff as much as possible to interact with their parishioners and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. As someone said, the gospel is good news only if it is not too late. I also note the tremendous work being done in his community by St John the Evangelist in Balby and, indeed, by many other churches in his local area.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Last Saturday I was privileged to attend the enthronement of the new Bishop of Lincoln, at which there was a vast array of clergy in all their finery. It was a very grand occasion. Lincoln is a predominantly rural diocese and many of the clergy serve five, six or more parishes. Can my hon. Friend reassure me that the Church will focus on providing more clergy to rural areas?

Andrew Selous: I am delighted that my hon. Friend was able to attend the consecration of the new Bishop of Lincoln. Consecrations are, indeed, very splendid affairs.

My hon. Friend is completely right that the beating heart of the Church of England is what goes on in the parishes. Rural areas really matter, as does every part of the country. I assure him that we will not forget rural areas, and I recognise the problems of large benefices.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): We also have rural churches in North Devon, and St Augustine's church in Heanton Punchardon is without a rector. Will my hon. Friend join me in recognising and congratulating Sharon Newcombe of Pilton on the service she has provided to that church, where she has sung in the choir for over 51 years?

Andrew Selous: I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking Sharon Newcombe for her fantastic service to her local church and local community. Fifty-one years' service to her local church is extremely impressive, and we are very grateful to her. I recognise that leading laypeople keep many of our churches going through these difficult times, and I thank her very much for what she does.

RESTORATION AND RENEWAL CLIENT BOARD

The hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Restoration and Renewal Client Board, was asked—
Women in Construction

10. **Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): If the Board will take steps to support the development of skills and creation of opportunities for women in construction through the restoration and renewal programme. [900096]

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Before I answer the question, Mr Speaker, can I say how nice it is to see the former Second Clerk of the Administration Committee by your side? Our loss is your gain. We always knew he would go far, and I am sure he has further to go.

The R&R programme is committed to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion so that people from all backgrounds working on the programme can thrive. Although the main construction works are still set to be some years away, the delivery authority is establishing or exploring relationships with skills and training providers across the whole UK that support initiatives to promote women in the construction industry. The programme also actively supports a number of awareness initiatives that encourage women into construction and engineering.

Mrs Elphicke: It is welcome that, during the work on the Elizabeth Tower, it was a common sight to see women in hard hats working on the scaffolding and other parts of that important, high-profile work. As we move through the restoration and renewal work, it has been my observation that women in hard hats are more likely to be seen directing traffic around the estate than undertaking this crucial frontline construction work.

Will my hon. Friend meet me and Kath Moore, the excellent chief executive of Women into Construction, to make sure that women are at the heart of the high-profile construction work being undertaken on Parliament's restoration and renewal programme?

Sir Charles Walker: Of course I will meet my hon. Friend and Kath Moore, but before that my hon. Friend and I shall sit down to work up a list of other people for Kath Moore to meet so that she can have a really constructive engagement as Women into Construction's representative across the House. I would also like to invite her to come to the Administration Committee to talk about the work of her organisation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I am just watching the clock tick.

Sir Charles Walker: I also want to say what an honour it is to be answering questions on behalf of the Restoration and Renewal Client Board in addition to the Commission—two fabulous bodies led by you, Mr Speaker.

Business of the House

10.30 am

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): The business for the week commencing 20 November will be:

MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill.

TUESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Media Bill.

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make his autumn statement, which will be followed by a debate on the autumn statement.

THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Continuation of a debate on the autumn statement.

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 27 November will include:

MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of a debate on the autumn statement.

TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill.

WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill.

THURSDAY 30 NOVEMBER—General debate. Subject to be confirmed.

FRIDAY 1 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

Lucy Powell: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business.

I thank all those who ensured that Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday constituency events passed off safely.

I want to ask the Leader of the House about two issues. First, before the ink is even dry on the King's Speech, the Prime Minister has announced emergency legislation—you could not make it up! The Supreme Court ruling against the Government was as damning as it was clear. It concluded that deep and institutional issues in Rwanda make it not a safe country. That should not have come as a surprise to the Government, because they had been warned for months. The Prime Minister bet the house that he would win and he lost. Before his new legislative programme has even got under way, we have more desperate wheezes to salvage his sinking plan: a new treaty, which could take weeks of parliamentary time to ratify; and new laws, which a former Supreme Court judge branded "discreditable". Why did the Home Secretary not say anything about that to Parliament yesterday? It is yet another announcement to the media and not to this place.

Will the Leader of the House tell us more about how this is all going to work? What legal effect will this emergency legislation have? When will we see it? How much parliamentary time does she think this is all going to take? What will be dropped from the Government's recently announced Bills to make way for this? If the Government are so confident that this is what it will take, why did they not do it months ago instead of sitting around waiting for this judgment, as though Parliament had not spent weeks and weeks considering these issues and legislating to deal with them? The

Government could have amended the Illegal Migration Act 2023 instead, could they not? Or was the former Home Secretary right when she said that the Government "failed to prepare any...credible plan B"?

Was the new Home Secretary right when he said yesterday that he did not see a case for coming out of international agreements? Or does the Leader of the House agree with the Prime Minister that we could do so? These are desperation tactics to try to make the Government look as though they are doing something, when the truth is that this is a failed, unworkable and costly plan that leaves their pledge to stop the boats stranded.

Secondly, the Prime Minister seemingly could not find a suitable candidate to be Foreign Secretary from among his own MPs and instead appointed David Cameron to the House of Lords. At a time of war in Europe, a horrifying conflict in Israel and Gaza, and threats from China, Iran and elsewhere, elected Members here are now unable to hold the Foreign Secretary to account. I agree entirely with you, Mr Speaker, that this House must be able to scrutinise his work effectively, because, let us be honest, there is a lot to hold him accountable for: his links with China, which the Intelligence and Security Committee said may have been "engineered" by the Chinese state; his policy towards China, famously drinking pints with President Xi and hailing a "golden era"; and his involvement with Greensill Capital, which was described by the Treasury Committee as a "significant lack of judgment", but none the less made him personally millions of pounds richer. The Government proposal that the Minister for Development and Africa, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), will stand in is entirely insufficient.

The last time the House was in this situation, Conservative Members were furious and demanded that questions must be answered in this place. The then Labour Government were set to bring in the recommendations of the Procedure Committee at the time. Does the Leader of the House agree that we should immediately dust off that report and bring forward a motion to put its recommendations in place quickly? They include regular accountability sessions for the Foreign Secretary in Westminster Hall as a starter. Will she do that before we are next due to hear from the Foreign Secretary?

Finally, can the Leader of the House confirm whether the appointment of David Cameron has been approved by the independent adviser on ministerial interests? If not, when will that be done? Or is this another case of making the wrong call, such as when the Prime Minister appointed his first Deputy Prime Minister, his first Home Secretary and his first Minister without Portfolio, all of whom faced serious allegations that later led to their departures? This is another poor judgment from a weak Prime Minister, drifting to defeat.

Penny Mordaunt: I agree with the comments that the hon. Lady made about Armistice Day and Remembrance weekend. I thank all Members who took part in events around the country and overseas to commemorate and thank our servicemen and women, and to remember the fallen. I particularly thank the police, who had an incredibly difficult job on their hands in London at the weekend.

It is a gift that every one of us in this place can raise issues in debates via amendments and other devices. As a Member and as Leader of the House, I will always

defend that right, but it does not absolve us from thinking through the consequences of one course of action over another. The debate last night showed the House, including its two main parties and the bulk of Members, united in its support for Israel's duty to protect her people, an end to suffering for all civilians and a long-term peaceful solution.

Since the vote last night, I know some Members have come under increased stress. No matter which way people voted, it will have been a considered decision. No matter whether people agree with them or not, it is their duty to exercise their own judgment. Today, all Members should think about what they can do to defuse such threats made against our colleagues in this place.

I thank Mr Speaker for his care in ensuring we can go about our business and do our duties. I thank the families of those held hostage by Hamas for their time coming into Parliament this week to talk to parliamentarians. I know I speak for all here when I say that we will do all in our power to bring them home.

Turning to the questions raised by the shadow Leader of the House, her first point was about Rwanda. She will expect me to say that further business will be announced in the usual way, but as she will have heard from the Prime Minister, we want to introduce this legislation swiftly. It is part of a plan of action that he has set out and that has been worked on by the Home Office and other Departments, together with the largest ever small boats deal with France; a new agreement with Albania, which has already returned nearly 5,000 people in the last 10 months and cut Albanian small boat arrivals by more than 90%; an almost 70% increase in the number of illegal working raids; a tripling in the number of asylum decisions since the start of the year; a plan to close the first 50 asylum hotels; and the legislation that we have brought forward.

There are many points of difference, but one key difference is that we believe there must be a deterrent element to our response. The hon. Lady's party voted 70 times against the legislation that we have brought forward and Opposition Members also supported blocking the deportation of foreign criminals. The people of this country want our borders to be protected and controlled. They want to ensure that we are free and able to help those we wish to and have the greatest obligation to. Under the last Labour Government, the mode of illegal travel here was largely haulage. We ended that. Brexit has also given us many more options to shape who comes here legally.

We must end the scourge of these appalling people-traffickers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman), assisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) and others, have helped us thus far, and I thank them for all the work that they have been doing. It has been difficult work. There is more to do, but we are a step closer to the deterrent that we seek. I urge the shadow Leader of the House to support us in our efforts. We will introduce legislation; it is quite normal, as she knows, to do that even if it is not included in the King's Speech. There are many potential situations for that to arise on a number of issues facing Parliament in this Session.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of the new Foreign Secretary, a person who has done a tremendous amount on the last topic that she raised—combating illegal migration

—through his work with Professor Paul Collier and the work that he has done on conflict states. He was ahead of the curve on that issue, and I think that he will make an excellent Foreign Secretary. She is right that the House must be able to hold him to account. This is not an unusual situation; it has happened before with the noble Lords Mandelson, Adonis, Frost, Morgan and I think others.

The hon. Lady should be reassured that Mr Speaker has taken advice on the matter. My understanding is that the Procedure Committee will be consulted on the best way forward. She alluded to some of the options that may be required of the new Foreign Secretary, who I know will want to be accountable to this House. There are very important matters in front of us. Next year will be an unprecedented year for elections across the world, with significant consequences for this nation and an ever-increasing set of complex issues that I know all hon. Members will want to question the Foreign Secretary on. She has my assurance in that respect. Further business will be announced in the usual way.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The House and my right hon. Friend will know of my personal and political interest in residential leasehold reform. When might the leasehold and freehold reform Bill come to the House, and will she join me in giving more publicity to the consultation, "Modern leasehold: restricting rents on existing leases", which started a week ago and will last for another five weeks? The ground rent issue affects up to 6 million households. Most people do not know that the Government are considering five alternatives for restricting it. Will she help to publicise that, and say when the Bill might be introduced so that the House can consider the issue?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend, who is very experienced, has already provided a solution to one part of his question by getting that on the record and advertising it to all hon. Members. I will certainly ensure that the Secretary of State has heard of his particular interest. He will not be surprised to hear me say that further business will be announced in the usual way, but I shall endeavour to ensure that he is kept informed by the Department of progress on the Bill.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): People in Scotland learned something this week: however much we dislike and distrust this Tory Government, it is nothing compared with how much they utterly loathe each other. Those letters, emails and WhatsApp messages show that they spend their time attacking each other, leaving no time to help people struggling with the Tory mortgage and rent bombshell or with rocketing energy bills, and no time to reduce NHS waiting lists in England, now approaching 8 million, or to cap food inflation, which is still running at over 10%. They are way too busy fighting like rats in a sack. Even their squalid, unlawful Rwanda scheme has fallen apart.

However, I bring good news to the Leader of the House to cheer her up—news from a part of the UK where a Government are getting on with the job; where not a single day has been lost in the NHS to industrial disputes; where teachers are the best paid in the UK;

[Deidre Brock]

where the Scottish child payment is taking tens of thousands out of poverty; where the railways have been taken into public ownership; where there are free school meals for all pupils, P1 to P5; where there are more GPs per head than anywhere in the UK; where those aged 60 and over get free bus travel, along with our under-22-year-olds; and where we offer free university tuition, free prescriptions, free eye tests, and free personal care to our older folk. That is in Scotland under the SNP-led Scottish Government, as the Leader of the House knows, but her Government have a cunning plan to make everything come good: a new Minister for common sense—a wokefinder general, to search out woke thinking and eliminate it. The job is in the safe hands of someone who is allowed to attend Cabinet, but is prohibited from speaking in meetings—and anyone who knows the new Minister knows that a period of silence may be her first and overwhelming challenge. For some light relief in this very bleak week for her Government, could the Leader of the House help many of her baffled colleagues and try to give us her definition of “woke”?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure that you, Mr Speaker, would take a dim view of it if I refused to answer the hon. Lady’s question—if I just stood here in silence because I did not fancy doing it, or objected strongly to the content and tone of the question. Had I done that, you might ask why I showed up this morning if I was not prepared to do my duty in this House and to show respect to the House. It would be a bit like attending at the Cenotaph and not singing the national anthem.

The hon. Lady displays a distinct lack of self-awareness. I grow tired of reading out to her each week statistics on the performance of her own Government, but since she invites me to again, let me give her two statistics that address the issues she raises. In England, the NHS 18-month waiting lists are down by 94% since September 2021; and a doctor or a headteacher in Scotland pays approximately £2,000 more in tax. I will continue to do my duty to this House, and to remind the SNP of their appalling record in government, which is obvious to everyone except them.

Finally, on all sorts of issues that many would perhaps describe as “woke” this Government have a proud record, because we recognise that compassion and care for everyone in our society is very important. That is why we did the largest ever LGBT action plan, from which we wanted practical measures that would make a difference to people’s lives. Conservatism, to me, has always been about the practical impact that we have on people’s lives, and stepping up and taking responsibility, not just for ourselves but for other people. Given her background and life experiences, I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey), who will now sit at the Cabinet Table, will be very good in that role.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): Transitioning toward net zero and increasing renewable energy is critical, but we need a just transition. I am conscious that constituents in Suffolk Coastal feel that a lot of the onshore infrastructure is being put in an unsuitable place, when further down the coast, at Bradwell in Essex, there is an ideal brownfield site to accommodate it. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate—perhaps it could be the general debate next Thursday, which is

yet to be announced—in which we could discuss the importance of rewiring the national grid?

Penny Mordaunt: First, may I place on the record—on behalf of everyone in this place, I am sure—our thanks to my right hon. Friend for all the work she did in her former Department? I know she was incredibly passionate about that work, going right back to when she was a junior Minister in that Department, and she should be very proud of the many things she enabled to happen on her double watch. I thank her for raising this issue in her constituency, which I know she is very concerned about. The Secretary of State has made it a priority and is giving it a lot more attention and focus, and I shall make sure that she is aware of my right hon. Friend’s particular interest.

Mr Speaker: I call and congratulate the unopposed Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, Ian Mearns.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. I have had the privilege of being in that role since June 2015, although I have a funny feeling this will be my last term in it, for a whole range of different reasons—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Well, the holder has to be a member of the Opposition. As we speak, the Committee cannot yet meet, but I understand that all political parties have made or are making nominations to the Committee of Selection. As soon as it agrees the nominations, the Backbench Business Committee can get up and running again. I hope that the first meeting can take place as soon as Tuesday 28 November. If it can happen before then, we certainly will try to ensure that it does. I understand from the Clerks that there is already a queue of applications to be presented to the Committee; we will try to get that all together as soon as possible.

Bus drivers and other staff employed by Go North East are on indefinite strike in a pay dispute. They seek pay parity with their company colleagues in the north-west region. The strike leaves constituents almost totally stranded and unable to get to work, places of study, hospitals and shops. Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport about his intentions to bring an end to this dire paralysis in my Gateshead constituency and across the wider north-east region? Go North East provides bus services to a large part of the north-east region, and I am afraid to say it is no go at the moment.

Penny Mordaunt: I add my congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on remaining Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, and thank him for all the work he does in that respect. I come here every week to this Dispatch Box with reasons to vote Conservative, and he has furnished us with another one, because we do not want to lose him as Chairman of that Committee. He has my assurance that we are committed to the swift establishment of the Committee. If that cannot be done before the general debate, subject to be announced, that I announced in the business question, we will take a steer from the topics that his Committee has already looked at.

I am very sorry to hear about the disruption to the hon. Gentleman’s constituents’ ability to travel. He will know that that is a concern to this Government. It is one reason why we have brought forward legislation to

guarantee minimum service levels in areas such as transport and emergency services. It is incredibly important that industrial action, particularly when it takes place over long periods of time, does not disrupt people's lives and cause them, for example, to lose their jobs, as has been happening in other parts of the country. I urge him to reflect on whether he could support those measures, particularly for specific sectors, that we will bring forward in this Session.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): About 40 years ago I had an unlikely campaigning role that involved organising counter-demonstrations to certain mass marches, but one area we never had to worry about was the vicinity of Parliament, because no demonstrations were allowed in Parliament Square. The reason given for that was that Members must not be impeded in entering or leaving the Houses of Parliament. Even if demonstrations continue to be allowed in Parliament Square, it should be a common concern to those on both sides of the House that Members find themselves getting advice from their Whips on which exits they cannot use for fear of being mobbed by an unauthorised demonstration that comes right up to the gates of Parliament. This really has gone too far. Sooner or later there will be an incident, unless security on entering and leaving the Houses of Parliament is restored.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this important matter. It is quite right that Members of Parliament and their staff should be able to go about their business in safety and security, and should not be disrupted in doing so. Mr Speaker was particularly concerned about this even prior to yesterday's incidents, and has been working with Palace security and other organisations to ensure the safety of Members of Parliament in particular. Since the Deputy Speaker is in the Chair, I shall make sure that Mr Speaker has heard my right hon. Friend's concerns, and I will ask that my right hon. Friend be kept informed of progress on such matters.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I am sorry to ask the right hon. Lady about this again, because I know she is one of the angels on this matter, but when I asked her last summer about conversion therapy, she promised a draft Bill on the subject in the last Session. There was no draft Bill, and there is nothing in the King's Speech. The Government say that is because this is very complicated. It is not complicated. Loads of countries have measures on this, and have had for years. Is the real reason, as I have been told, that the Minister for Women and Equalities herself is blocking this much-needed reform?

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Gentleman will know that bringing an end to these practices is a manifesto commitment. It remains a manifesto commitment. He will also know that this is a complex situation. A lot of work has already been done, particularly by faith groups, to enable ideas and solutions to be brought forward. I thank all Members who have engaged on this, particularly with the Minister who leads on the issue, to try to make progress. The Secretary of State is still looking at the policy on this, and she is very aware that the House will want her decision brought forward. I know that she is taking great care to ensure that we can protect people who might be vulnerable to these kinds of barbaric practices.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Later today, Councillor Garry Perry from my constituency will be attending the Local Government Information Unit and CCLA councillor awards. Garry has been shortlisted for a lifetime legend award, in recognition of his dedication to building a safer, stronger, greener and more resilient community. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing him all the best in the awards later today?

Penny Mordaunt: I do not know whether it was audible to those listening, but there were choruses of approval from around the House. I speak on behalf of all of us when I say to Councillor Garry Perry: thank you for your decades of service to your community. Our councillors are all unsung heroes. They do a tremendous amount of work and good in their communities, and I wish Garry and all other nominees who have been shortlisted for these awards good luck; they have our thanks.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Air pollution is an invisible killer. Over 40,000 people in the UK die each year as a consequence of dirty air. The clean air zone introduced in Bath by the Liberal Democrat-run council has reduced nitrogen dioxide by over a quarter, which is an impressive achievement, saving lives. Can we have a debate in Government time about the importance of clean air and what the Government can do to support local councils?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. She will know that this has been a focus for the Government; they have identified zones around the country that need improvement and ensured that local authorities can put measures in place to address these matters. This is an area where we can benefit from sharing best practice across the country. It is important that we do these things while still enabling economic growth to flourish, as we know we can. I am sure that if she were to apply for a debate on the subject, it would be well attended.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Can we have a debate on the failure of the Metropolitan police to investigate an openly terrorist-supporting Socialist Workers party pamphlet, which has been reported on in several newspapers, entitled "Palestine: Resistance, Revolution and the Struggle for Hamas"? It has been on sale during the protest marches every weekend in London, and it includes the line:

"we unconditionally support Hamas when it is engaged in military or non-military struggles against Israel."

This poison has been on sale for weeks, including, I am told, right outside this House, in Parliament Square. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the police should act under section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for raising this important matter—it is extremely disturbing to hear that. He will know that the police chiefs have our total backing in using the full extent of the law to crack down on any criminality, and what he describes sounds like it falls into that category. The police have powers to arrest those who belong to or glorify terrorist groups such as Hamas under the Terrorism Act 2000 and anyone who incites racial hatred under the Public Order Act 1986, and we support them in

[Penny Mordaunt]

using those powers. I am afraid that the Socialist Workers are rentagobs who show up to all kinds of protests, spouting all kinds of hate, and deserve a closer look.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): As the Leader of the House may be aware, I am co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for access to medical cannabis under prescription. Currently, young Teagan Appleby, who is a constituent of the hon. Member for Dover (Mrs Elphicke), is in hospital in London and very poorly. The former Minister made every effort in his role to break down the barriers for medicinal cannabis under prescription to children with epilepsy. Will the Leader of the House please urge the new Minister to call a roundtable of all the stakeholders, so that those children can get the medicine they deserve?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Dover for the work they have been doing on this issue. I will certainly make sure that the new Secretary of State has heard about the hon. Lady's comments today and is aware of her interest in this matter.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I bring some sad news to the House this morning: my Conservative predecessor, Sir Thomas Arnold, died on Tuesday. He is known to many on the Conservative Benches for his years of work—a decade or so—as chair of candidates. He was the godson of Ivor Novello, and as well as inheriting the rights to various of his musicals, he also inherited his piano. He was quite a character and was a great support to me, and gave me much wise advice; whether I always followed it is a different matter.

As chair of candidates, Sir Thomas oversaw the 1987 and 1992 elections, and is responsible—or, indeed, culpable—for a number of Members being in this House today. His guiding words were these:

“The Conservative Party...is looking for men and women who have a good working knowledge of contemporary politics and a proven track record of experience...who above all know their own minds.”

With those words in mind, might the Leader of the House be able to facilitate a debate so that we can all learn how parties across the House can attract such candidates to be elected to this place?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure I speak for all Members present when I say how sorry we are at that sad news, and that our thoughts are with Sir Thomas's friends and family. He achieved the only Conservative gain in the 1974 election, which was the second time he stood for Parliament. He was Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office and later in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was vice-chairman of the party under Peter Brooke in 1983, and I am told that the most enjoyable time he spent in Parliament was when he headed the Commons Treasury Select Committee, which included an investigation into the downfall of Barings bank. He achieved a great deal for this country, and we remember him and his service fondly. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Lab): On 26 October in a point of order, I named Zaher Birawi and Muhammad Qassem Sawalha as Hamas operatives living in London.

Since then, further Hamas operatives such as Majed Khalil al-Zeer and Ziad El Aloul have come to light as British nationals with links to Hamas, a terrorist organisation. Given the national security implications, can we have an urgent statement in Government time on what the Home Office is doing about Hamas operatives here in Britain?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter, which I know is a concern for many Members across the House. We have given the police new and updated powers, and we will continue to look at what further support they can be given to tackle this appalling situation. There can be absolutely no tolerance for anyone who facilitates or supports terrorism—that is very clear, and I think that view is shared on all sides of this House, even if some Members sometimes find it hard to articulate it.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): As the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) has said, Teagan Appleby, my teenage constituent, is at the moment in intensive care across the road in the Evelina London Children's Hospital. My right hon. Friend will know from my question and her answer in June, that it was an urgent matter for Teagan to have support from the Government to have funding for and access to her medicinal cannabis, which she needs to manage her epilepsy. That meeting—my right hon. Friend was kind in her support for it and her follow-up with the Department of Health—has still not happened.

Can I ask my right hon. Friend to pass another message to the Health Secretary to say, not that we need another the meeting on this issue, but that we need action and that we need the funding to be available to every single child who needs access to this medicine now? There needs to be, in the autumn statement, a special fund set aside to allow these children to have access to the medicine they need. Teagan's mother, Emma, could not do any more, and she was heartbroken when she sent me a message overnight—at midnight—that Teagan is now intubated and that she has to be kept in that medical state to manage 19 days of constant seizures.

Penny Mordaunt: I am extremely sorry to hear what my hon. Friend has said. I do appreciate that Members across this House will have had experiences in which we are very invested in the wellbeing of our constituents, and I know this will be a very difficult time not just for Teagan and her family, but for my hon. Friend and others who have campaigned on this issue.

I am very disappointed to hear that the Department of Health has not met my hon. Friend. I wish to make it clear, and I do make it clear to Departments, that my requests for meetings between officials or Ministers and Members of this House are not optional. This House can call people to meet it in Select Committees, and Government Departments are funded to provide services to this House, and I am really very disappointed that the Department of Health has not done that.

I know that immediately after this session, even though I will be in the Chamber, my officials will contact the Department of Health and, through my Parliamentary Private Secretary, will contact the Secretary of State for Health to make her aware of this situation. We appreciate that we cannot make clinical decisions on behalf of

individual patients, but what we can ensure is that, if a drug or medical device could benefit a patient, the systems are in place to ensure that they get access to it. Even if it is not for a NICE-approved treatment, people in this country still have that right. We will facilitate an immediate meeting with the Department of Health, and I will be kept informed of progress on this matter.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Scotland is energy rich—in the last two months alone, Scotland exported 3.2 million MWh of electricity through the grid to England—yet along with the people of north Wales, Scots pay the highest electricity costs in the UK. Londoners pay £246 a year in standing charges before a switch or a gas hob is turned on, but in the parts of the UK where lighting and heating are turned on far earlier and turned off far later, these standing charges are over one third higher, at £333 a year. Does the Leader of the House really think that is fair, and if not, will she facilitate a debate on these unjust standing charges?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this point. I think standing charges should get scrutiny from this House. I know that many hon. and right hon. Members will have concerns in all parts of the UK about fairness and how some charges are being applied. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am sure that, if he were to apply for a debate, it would be well attended.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): As we saw in yesterday's King's Speech debate, some views on the Gaza conflict are becoming dangerously oversimplified and binary—someone is either in favour of a ceasefire, or they are in favour of the war continuing. That is not just misleading, it is also provocative. Will the Government utilise a statement or hold a debate to confirm Britain's position on supporting a humanitarian pause—a position that was adopted by United Nations Security Council resolution 2712 last night?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that issue. He has great experience in this area. He is right, and I think the view was expressed well last night that in calling for a ceasefire, what people have been asking is for Israel to deviate from its duty to protect its citizens and defend itself. If Israel puts down its arms, it ceases to exist. That is the situation now, and only the end of Hamas, or whatever might try to take their place, and a long-term solution that guarantees peace, will enable it to do that. That is very important. We have a proud track record of protecting international humanitarian law and protecting citizens. We monitor closely what goes on not just with this situation but with others, including the attention to detail and care that Israel is taking in ensuring that it is the right side of that line. My right hon. Friend will know that on recent operations, the Israeli Defence Forces will have had humanitarian and medical professionals embedded in its forces to ensure that that happens. I repeat what I said at the start of this question: whatever hon. Members decide to do in this place, based on their conscience, they should be allowed to do it. We can all take care of each other in this place when hon. Members, inevitably and sadly, come under threat for doing so.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): November marks Islamophobia Awareness Month, which is a time for everyone committed to equality and anti-racism to reiterate their position on Islamophobia, and their dedication to stamping out that hate. It has now been five years since the all-party group on British Muslims published its definition of Islamophobia, which was backed by community groups, academics, political parties, trade unions, and many councils. It is four years since the Government committed to developing an official definition, and one year since they decided that tackling hatred against Muslims is not important and abandoned that plan. Given that Islamophobia is up by 600% since October, will the Leader of the House urge the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to come to the House and give a statement on his work on tackling Islamophobia?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. I will certainly write to the Secretary of State, and to other Secretaries of State who will have an interest, to ensure that they have heard what he said. I recently visited Birmingham to show support to the Jewish community there in the wake of some of the attacks that they were having to endure. I was struck by the fact that the local Muslim community had come over to the Hebrew centre to show support, to condemn Hamas, and to stand with the Jewish community in the wake of those attacks. When I inquired why they had done that, they told me that as well as being the right thing to do, in the wake of 9/11, when the Muslim community had come under attack and been associated—wrongly—with those terrorist atrocities, the Jewish community came and stood between them and an angry mob, to protect them. What is often lost in the recent scenes we have seen is the decades of quiet work between different faith communities who all believe in the same God.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): May I ask for a debate in Government time on the scrutiny of financial services regulation? Since we left the European Union, that has been undertaken by a Sub-Committee of the Treasury Committee. We have appointed expert advisers, we regularly take evidence on new consultations from the regulators and we have published reports to keep the House informed about that scrutiny for well over a year now.

I was therefore a bit surprised yesterday to see that the Liaison Committee in the other place has published a recommendation that it set up a financial services regulation scrutiny committee. Paragraphs 10 and 15 of its report suggest that that committee would substantially duplicate and potentially contradict ours, and of course it would cost Parliament a significant sum to set up.

If the Leader of the House is not able to spare Government time to debate this important topic, would she be kind enough to write to her counterpart in the other place to express the concerns of our cross-party membership that the proposed committee would duplicate the work that we are already doing and have thoroughly established in this House?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Madam Deputy Speaker was smiling at me to remind me, I think, of my responsibilities. I cannot ask

[Penny Mordaunt]

the other place to change its scrutiny arrangements: it is responsible for those. However, my hon. Friend makes a good point about economy of effort, and I will certainly be able to make sure that the Lords has heard what she has said today. I hope that a way forward can be found that is in the interests of both Chambers.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Reclaim): Despite there being seven constituencies in the great county of Leicestershire, more than half of all the illegal migrants in hotels in the county are located in just one of them. My constituents thank the Government immensely for that enrichment of our lives.

Following the Supreme Court ruling yesterday against the Government's Rwanda policy, can we have a statement and a debate in Government time on how we can secure this country's borders and dissuade illegal migrants from travelling to our country? Hopefully, one day, we may get some hotels back for the enjoyment of the local population.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important point. I am sure he has met the Home Secretary about his first point. If he has not to date, I would encourage him to do so. I am sure that if we were to hold a debate on this matter, it would be very well attended. I would like to use Government time to bring forward further legislation that enables us to get the Rwanda scheme working, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman would support that. He will know that the Minister for Immigration has announced the closure of the first wave of asylum hotels. I do not know if any of those are in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but he will know that that is the first tranche of several.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Yesterday, more than 60 Members of this House and the other place met under the auspices of the all-party Britain-Israel parliamentary group and witnessed the video of the true atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October. Rarely have I seen Members of this House and the other place so silent and so horrified.

In contrast, overnight the Israel Defence Forces have facilitated the media to enter the Al-Shifa Hospital, the Rantisi children's hospital and the Nasser Hospital, all of which have been demonstrated to be command and control centres and weapons centres. At the children's hospital, there is clear evidence that hostages were kept there by Hamas and have subsequently been moved. That is in direct contrast to what many people have seen in the media across the world from those people who support Hamas.

May we have a statement from the Government, probably from a Foreign Office Minister in this place, on exactly what is happening in terms of progress in liberating Gaza from Hamas and the attempts being made by the IDF to minimise civilian casualties as this terrible war continues?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important point. He is correct that it is now clear that hospitals and other civilian places have been used by Hamas. That is not news: a 2015 report by Amnesty International alleges that the Shifa Hospital has served

as a Hamas interrogation and torture centre for some time. To reassure the House, Members will know that the Israel Defence Forces are doing a huge amount and taking great care with regard to civilian lives, as they do the very difficult job of clearing these areas out and trying to destroy Hamas and their network. The IDF transferred incubators, baby food and additional medical supplies to hospital compounds, and on Sunday they opened up additional humanitarian corridors from various hospitals for civilians and patients to evacuate—on foot if they could, or via ambulance—to the south.

The Israeli-operated humanitarian corridors have reportedly been used by approximately a quarter of a million Palestinians. Today, I understand that Israel is facilitating the provision of fuel to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to enable the delivery of aid into Gaza. Its job is made harder by the operations of Hamas—I think that, in terms of getting people out, a third of the names on the list provided by Hamas to Egypt and Israel were known Hamas terrorists, leading to delays in civilians getting the medical attention they require. This is an incredibly difficult situation, and I urge all hon. Members to be kept informed and up to date about what is happening on the ground.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): The Leader of the House may be aware that there is a sale in principle that will secure the future of Newport Wafer Fab in my constituency. I had just secured a meeting with the Minister, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), to discuss next steps when he sadly fell victim to the Prime Minister's reshuffle this week. Can the Leader of the House tell me which Minister is now responsible for the semiconductor industry, and will she help me get a meeting in the diary as a matter of urgency?

Penny Mordaunt: I am pleased to hear the good news in the hon. Lady's constituency. My job is to ensure that batons are not dropped during reshuffles, and I shall be very happy to assist her in ensuring that it is not dropped in this case.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I rise yet again to bring to the Leader of the House another tale of woe, incompetence and financial stupidity from Mid Devon Liberal Democrats. The elected idiots have driven the council to bankruptcy, because they will not make savings, but their useless leaders have given themselves a bung of £50,000, which is obviously ridiculous. I also notice that the head of scrutiny—another incompetent, for God's sake—is living near luxury houses in Bampton, which are for sale; they are meant to be low-cost housing. Can we please have a debate—again, I ask the Government for this—so that this ridiculous council can be held to account and stop costing the taxpayers of Mid Devon millions because of its absolute incompetence?

Penny Mordaunt: This is a familiar refrain that we hear from my hon. Friend about the difficulties that his constituents are having to endure because of his local authority. He has provided his own answer by getting it on the record. I know that he will urge his constituents and others to make a different choice as soon as they can, at the next local elections, about who should be running their local authority.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): This is not about Mid Devon. A large amount of electricity is generated from wind power in my constituency in the north of Scotland, and more will be generated in the future. It is necessary to get that electricity to where it is needed—conurbations in England and Wales—and the proposal is to take it south by means of colossal pylons. Those pylons and their proposed route are causing much concern to the communities who will be nearest to them. Constituents and people living in other parts of Scotland—this affects right hon. and hon. Members all over Scotland—have suggested to me that the electricity should be moved by means of subsea cables. This is a strategic decision for the UK for many years to come. I have written to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero requesting a meeting to discuss the matter. May I ask the right hon. Lady what advice she has for me in taking it forward?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his work on behalf of his constituents. I thank him for early warning of the topic he would raise. That was very helpful, because I have heard from the Minister that a meeting will be facilitated, and I will ensure that that happens in good order.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Farming communities and rural businesses in my constituency and across the country face many challenges. We have a new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in post, so could we have a debate in Government time so that he can outline how he intends to meet the challenges of the rural community?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter for the often unsung heroes of our country, who are doing a tremendous amount to feed us, build resilience and take care of our precious countryside. I will certainly make sure that the new Secretary of State has heard of his interest in this matter. He will know that the Secretary of State's predecessor produced an action plan for rural communities, but the farming community will be a tremendous focus of the new Secretary of State. We must support farmers, as large enterprises, to do what we ask of them and to thrive.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We know that Conservative leaders past and present are fond of travel on private jets. In respect of David Cameron, it is a matter of public record that the Treasury Committee referred the question of his travel on the Greensill Capital private jet to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs for tax purposes. Can the Leader of the House confirm that the outcome of those inquiries was considered by the House of Lords Appointments Commission before he was made Foreign Secretary?

Penny Mordaunt: My understanding is that all the processes for scrutinising and approving appointments to the House of Lords and ministerial office have been followed. I think that all investigations into David Cameron—I think I can still refer to him as that—prior to his elevation to the Lords have closed. However, some things are still open. GFG's relationship with Greensill Capital is still part of investigations being conducted by the Serious Fraud Office. The SNP gave

GFG £586 million to guarantee jobs at a smelting plant that never materialised, and the group also happened to sponsor its 2018 party conference.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Can we have a debate on local funding priorities and the importance of community consultations on them being fairly worded and accessible to all? Labour-led Cheshire East Council is considering imposing unwarranted car parking charges even in residential neighbourhoods, and is mooting closing Holmes Chapel and Middlewich leisure centres—community facilities that are vital to the wellbeing of all ages. The council is also considering stopping maintenance on 80 green sites, risking eyesores and tipping. Of those, 36 are on the lovely Grange Way estate in Sandbach in my constituency, where those amenity lands have been publicly maintained for over 50 years.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend will know that, under the Local Government Act 1999, a council must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way that its functions are exercised, and have regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. It must consult local people about how it should fulfil that duty. There are mountains of good practice on the high street portal, which demonstrate that introducing parking charges where those core principles are not taken into account is often a disaster. I encourage my hon. Friend to look at that to help her in her valiant arguments against what the council is planning to do. The next questions to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are on 4 December, but I will make sure that the Secretary of State has heard her concerns and ask Ministers to assist her in her important campaign.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Following on from my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), in this place I have repeatedly raised the scandal and injustice of standing charges on energy bills, which continue to rise. Finally, at long last, Ofgem is reviewing those charges and may get to a stage where it takes action to abolish them. Will the Leader of the House make a statement and lend her voice to calls for the abolition of these opaque charges, which hit the very poorest households hardest in my constituency and across the UK?

Penny Mordaunt: That is not in my portfolio, but as a constituency MP I have long talked about standing charges and it is good that they are being looked at. The Secretary of State is also keen to ensure that where the charges exist they are fair. It is quite wrong that in some cases people could be paying £30 a month, even if they are not using any energy at all. We are not helping the poorest in our society unless we are focused on ensuring that such charges are fair. The hon. Lady is right to point out that this issue is being looked at. She is not the first Member to mention it today and I shall bring it to the Secretary of State's attention that she has also raised it.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): The most powerful wind turbine in England went up recently in my constituency at Checkley Wood with local support. It can generate 4.1 MW, which is enough to power 2,500 homes. Will the Government ensure that local communities

[Andrew Selous]

benefit from cheaper power, especially from single or very small cluster high-capacity turbines, which are so much less visually intrusive?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend and his constituents for what they are doing to make our nation resilient. The Government want to ensure that communities that participate in such facilities also benefit from them. We have published a consultation on how the current system of community benefits in England can be improved. That closed in July and the Government will shortly bring forward the results, and no doubt further policies. I thank him for raising this matter.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): May we have a debate on the appalling service offered by the Home Office? I have been working for over a year with a constituent who has been trying to get a visa for his family, including a young baby, who are currently in Pakistan as refugees, having fled Afghanistan. Despite jumping through numerous hoops, my constituent's family still do not have a visa and the Pakistan authorities are seeking to deport refugees back to Afghanistan. I emailed the Home Office urgent inquiries inbox—I emphasise “urgent”—on 25 October, but after three weeks I have had no response. It really does beg the question: what exactly is the Home Office doing?

Penny Mordaunt: I am very sorry to hear that situation. If the hon. Gentleman would give my officials the details of that case, I will make sure it is raised immediately this afternoon. The Home Office offers, as I have advertised before, surgeries for colleagues with these sorts of cases, either online or in person in this place. If he has not made use of that to date I encourage him to do so, but given the urgency I shall make sure that the Home Office has heard what he has said this afternoon.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): For far too many months now, constituents across Crawley have been subject to substandard services from Royal Mail, with some streets going undelivered for weeks at a time. Disabled constituents are having to go to their local post office to pick up their mail. In one road there was a dog attack at one house, so now the whole road is not being delivered. Unfortunately, the response from Royal Mail has been really inappropriate. If we are to continue with a universal service that people can rely on, we really do need to see improvements. May we please have a statement?

Penny Mordaunt: This is not the first case of that service slipping that I have heard about recently. It is not just about people not receiving documents in a timely way; it can also be about people not receiving medicine and other important things, or missing hospital and doctors' appointments because they are not informed about them. It is an important issue, and I thank my hon. Friend for raising it. I will ensure that the Secretary of State has heard about the case that he has raised in connection with Crawley, but I will emphasise in my letter that I know the matter is of concern to many Members on both sides of the House, and will ask the Secretary of State to ensure that Royal Mail is being held to account for the service standards that it is required to deliver.

Andrew Western (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Yesterday the deputy chairman of the Conservative party advocated breaking the law in response to the Supreme Court's ruling on the Government's inhumane and illegal proposals concerning Rwanda. May I ask the Leader of the House what steps are available to Members to hold senior members of the governing party to account when they make such damaging statements which undermine the rule of law? May I also ask her what she thinks this means for the self-proclaimed party of law and order?

Penny Mordaunt: One of the reasons we are testing these matters in the courts and why we are having to proceed at this pace—we want to move faster—is that we want to ensure that what we are proposing is compliant with the law. If it is not compliant with the law, it will not work. That is why we are going through this process, and that is why, if necessary, we will do what we have done before and will continue to do, and make amendments to the statute book to enable us to do this. We are absolutely determined and united in our mission to ensure that we can control and protect the borders of this country. The criminal gangs who wish to bring people here illegally—people who are placed in tremendous jeopardy—will continue to adapt their model of business to try to get around the new measures that we introduce, but we are going to continue, and we are beating them. Boat crossings are down by a third in the last 12 months. We wish to end them completely: that is our mission, and that is what we will do.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): The biggest transport hub in my constituency, Barnstaple bus station, has not reopened since the pandemic, which has limited users' access to shelter and toilets. The Liberal Democrat-run district council is not pursuing options to reopen the space to the public, such as by finding an operator for the café. This is putting users off taking the bus into town, which can have a knock-on effect on businesses in the high street, especially as we enter the crucial pre-Christmas period. Ahead of Small Business Saturday, may we have a debate on the role of councils in supporting our high streets by providing key facilities?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to say that the performance of Liberal Democrat-run local authorities has been something of a theme in this session of business questions, and I am very sorry to hear about the situation in North Devon. As my hon. Friend will know, we have made available not only funding but advice and support to enable high streets to thrive, and also to enable community asset transfers to take place. I saw an example of that when I visited a local social enterprise in my hon. Friend's constituency which is helping town centres and villages to continue as thriving communities. This is so important that any delay in ensuring that people can enjoy these facilities is inexcusable. I thank my hon. Friend for the campaign that she is running on behalf of her constituents, and I will ask the Secretary of State to see whether there is anything further he can advise about what she can do. I will advertise Small Business Saturday on 2 December to all Members, and I thank my hon. Friend again for the work she is doing for her constituency.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I begin by saying how encouraged I am, and we all are, by the fact that the Leader of the House comes here every week to

answer our questions and our requests? It is, hopefully, appreciated by everyone— certainly by most of us. I think it important to put that on record.

In an October attack in Tunisia, a non-functioning synagogue was set on fire and seriously damaged during a protest. Police did not stop the attack. Various attacks in the Russian North Caucasus have left local Jewish communities afraid for their safety. There has been no word, or no response, from the Russian Government on those attacks. Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning the rising tide of antisemitism resulting from the Israel-Hamas war, and will she ask the relevant Minister from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to call for proper governmental responses to antisemitism in the regions that I have mentioned?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. The feeling is entirely mutual, as we are all very grateful to him for raising particular cases of appalling things that have happened around the world. They may not be headline news, but they are devastating to those communities, and particularly to faith communities that are being persecuted.

I will make sure that the new Foreign Secretary has heard what the hon. Gentleman says and understands his keen interest in this area. It is incumbent on all of us to recognise and tackle antisemitism, which has been around for a long time but is now on the rise. We need to combat it, and we need to ensure that communities, wherever they are in the UK or around the world, feel able to go about their business in safety and security, and feel able to wear symbols of their faith without fear as they live their daily lives. It is our first duty to ensure that, particularly in the United Kingdom, and I thank him for reminding us of it each week.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Can we have a debate in Government time on rural broadband and mobile connectivity? When I was elected in 2019, superfast broadband connectivity in Hinckley and Bosworth stood at only 0.2%; it is now over 67%. I urge anyone listening to contact my office to help increase that number. There are still hard and stubborn blackspots for mobile and broadband connectivity, so can we have a debate to make sure these vital services are there for my constituents?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter on behalf of his constituents. Basic 5G is now available in about 85% of UK premises and the surrounding areas, five years ahead of schedule, but of course we want people to benefit from this opportunity as soon as possible. We published the UK wireless infrastructure strategy in April, setting out a new ambition for a nationwide network of higher-quality, stand-alone 5G in all populated areas by 2030. It also set out new 6G strategies, alongside an investment of up to £100 million in future telecoms research. I will make sure the responsible Minister has heard that more needs to be done in my hon. Friend's constituency. This is vital to ensure that we see the economic growth we want in all parts of the UK.

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

MPs Staff: Employment Conditions

11.43 am

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Second Report of the Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff (HC 1714 of Session 2022–23), endorses its recommendations, recognises Members' responsibilities as employers and the need to improve the working lives of Members' staff and accordingly calls on the House of Commons Commission, IPSA and the political parties to address and implement the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference.

I move this motion on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker). He is at the funeral of Andrew Lee, who was a long-time Conservative party agent and activist. He was held in very high regard and had been an agent for many Members of this House. He was one of those characters we all know in our respective parties. He was the life and soul of our party, and our democracy is built on the shoulders of such people. They often do not get any focus or plaudits, but they do a huge amount to facilitate democracy in this country. My hon. Friend sends his apologies for not being here in person.

The second report of the Speaker's Conference makes a series of recommendations designed to improve the working lives of Members' staff and provide better support to Members as employers. The staff who work for us, as individual Members of Parliament, play a huge and valuable role not only in supporting our work here in Westminster but in working tirelessly for our constituents, often in very stressful situations.

The employment arrangements of Members' staff are not a matter for the Government, but I welcome the conclusion that Members of this House should continue to employ their own staff directly. It is for each Member to determine how best to carry out their role, and the current employment model provides an important element of flexibility to Members to arrange their staff in the way that best suits each individual Member.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am supportive of what the Leader of the House is bringing forward, but I must ask the following question. Many MPs do not have the training as employers to answer many questions and the staff development she is referring to is not natural to those of us who are not from that background. Does she agree that greater support to allow us to aid our staff development is imperative? That will allow staff to feel that there is a route to take to greater advancement. Does she agree that funding for that should be provided centrally, so that staff do not feel they are being scrutinised by the public for taking beneficial yet costly development courses?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. He will know that the report makes reference to ensuring that proper support, training and services are provided to enable individual Members to be the best employers they can be. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne, whose name is also on this motion and who would be moving it were he here, has also done a huge amount of work to ensure that Members in future will be able to undertake training and get qualifications, which is tremendously important.

[Penny Mordaunt]

It will help them in their work here and enable them to continue their career when they leave this place. It is a good use of budget, to enable us to be the best Members of Parliament that we can be.

I also welcome the recommendations on providing further help and support to Members and their staff in relation to employment matters. We need to ensure that all who work in Parliament are treated properly and fairly, and the package of measures announced in this report will deliver significant improvements. I particularly welcome the recommendations on improved mental health support for Members and their staff, and I know that colleagues in all parts of the House will do the same.

The report also makes a series of recommendations about the role of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. IPSA is rightly independent from both the Government and Parliament, but I note the constructive engagement that has taken place between the Speaker's Conference and IPSA, and the formal response published by IPSA earlier this week, which sets out how it aims to address some of the challenges identified by the Conference that fall within its areas of responsibility. I am pleased to see progress on entitlements to sickness and parental leave for staff who move between Members, and I look forward to seeing proposals on greater support for Members and staff in relation to constituency offices in due course.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I think the recommendations on continuity of service are important, having seen the injustice in that area in respect of one of my members of staff. Will the Leader of the House advise on whether those measures will apply retrospectively to existing staff?

Penny Mordaunt: I am proposing this on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne, but I shall certainly make sure that I can get the precise details to the hon. Gentleman. Much would depend on what is in an individual's contract, as those will vary substantially depending on how they had worked here. I will endeavour to get an answer to him on that.

Finally, I would like to endorse the report's conclusions about the valuable work of the Members' Services Team. It provides expert advice and support to colleagues on a range of matters, but in particular it is a vital source of support on employment issues. The report rightly recognises the value of that support and highlights the importance of colleagues' engaging with the team on any staffing issues that arise. I encourage any colleague with concerns about an employment issue to contact the team at the earliest opportunity, and I welcome the report's recommendations to create a system of account managers to provide more direct support to Members in this area.

I particularly wish to thank Chris Sear, the director of the Members' Services Team, who is retiring at the end of this month, after a long career in the House. The work that Chris has done to expand the services that provide assistance to Members of this House has been hugely welcome. He was instrumental and very helpful in conducting the largest Members' survey ever done, which took place this year and was about what kinds of services and support people needed. I want to place on record the gratitude that colleagues have for him and his team.

I hope these measures carry the support of Members and I commend the motion to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Deputy Leader of the House.

11.50 am

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): This is an important debate about the culture and working conditions in Parliament. As Members of this House and as employers of staff, we should ensure that all staff feel valued and respected, regardless of whether they are employed by Members directly or by the House authorities, in the Palace or in our constituency offices. Staff working across Parliament and the country are the backbone of our democracy and I give my personal thanks for their dedication. I am sure that sentiment is echoed across all Benches.

The issues of pay, recognition and ensuring a safe and respectful workplace are not new. They are long-standing issues on which we should always work hard, but it is important to recognise how much progress has been made. Thanks are due, in no small part, to the work of the parliamentary trade unions and the House authorities.

We support the recommendations outlined in the Speaker's Conference report, which are a welcome step in the right direction. Crucially, there will be changes for Members' staff concerning continuity of service that will mean improved maternity and paternity rights, enhanced rights regarding sick pay and better redundancy arrangements. Also, it is right that our HR functions, support and advice are available to our staff as well as to Members. That will enable staff to make informed choices about their employment.

On balance, the report concluded that MPs' staff should remain under the direct employment of Members, complemented by the new HR service. It will also be good to reclassify staff training and costs to support the widest participation in career development. Together, these are good steps in the right direction and should help improve the working culture of our House.

The report's primary purpose was not to focus on the conduct of Members and possible ways of redress, but that issue was partially covered. I welcome the role of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme in dealing with incidents of poor behaviour by Members. The process appears to be improving and timescales to complete cases are said to be coming down, but will the Leader of the House address the following questions: will recommendations concerning HR and continuity of service be finalised by the general election? Are there plans to look further at the role of the ICGS and its processes? Is a future assessment point planned to monitor progress of the report?

As I have set out, we welcome the recommendations of the report and thank the Speaker and the members of the Speaker's Conference for their diligence. Working together, we need to stick with this important task. Finally, if approved by Members today, I hope the report's recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible.

11.53 am

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I had not planned to speak in the debate, but as a member of the Speaker's Conference I thought, at the last minute,

it was important to come to the House to recognise the work of everyone involved in putting together the report. As the Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), acknowledged, we relied on many of the Speaker's staff and other staff in the House of Commons to put the report together.

The report is an important piece of work, which I welcome and hope will be approved today. While we are making progress, it is important that we continue to look at our organisation and ways in which we can improve. The relationship between staff and employers is at the heart of what this place is about in delivering democracy and legislating for the benefit of the country.

To change a culture takes time, and to implement that change takes time, but I think that this is an important and fundamental step forward. There has been progress, but there is always more to do. Let us continue to do it. This is the second report. I put on the record, as a member of the Conference, my thanks to the Members' Services Team and to Chris Sear, who was stalwart in supporting us. I, like many others I am sure, wish him well in his retirement.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson.

11.55 am

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The SNP of course welcomes any proposals that aim to ensure best employment practice, and in this case to ensure that staff are part of an inclusive, respectful and fair working environment. I pay tribute to the work of the Speaker's Conference and commend its recommendations. The high-profile incidents that in part sparked the report laid bare aspects of an inappropriate and unacceptable workplace culture that has run through this place, so with a renewed urgency the report undertook to ensure that current working practices and conditions of staff are fit for purpose, and that everyone who works in the parliamentary community feels supported and has uninhibited access to that support.

The contribution of MPs' staff to this place is enormous—we all know that—and all too often it goes unseen. As part of its inquiry into culture, the report spoke of a “collective failure” of the House to recognise and reward hard-working staff. Constituency staff in particular were singled out as feeling neglected and detached from Westminster, going without much of the support and additional services made available to those working on the estate. That is unacceptable and must, and I hope will, change. We welcome the report's recommendation to champion the work of MPs' staff—that is, the work of those who enable everyone here to do their job. We wholeheartedly support the aims of the report to ensure parity of employment conditions and a more rewarding work culture across the wider parliamentary community.

We are also very much in favour of the proposed expansion of the Members' Services Team, which over such a short time has already come to provide an invaluable and highly professional service. Having had to call on their help in the past, I know just how highly professional, helpful and sensitive to the issues they are. The recommendation of that team's evolution to a Members and Members' staff service is commendable.

As small employers, MPs should of course have access to better human resources support, but staff should also have access to guidance and advice independent of their employing MP.

The report described Members' staff as “uniquely vulnerable” and the current Members' Services Team was found to be under-resourced. The report's plan to incorporate a new restorative practice for workplace dispute resolution is a welcome recommendation that would help to create uniform procedures for MPs' staff across this House. Inadequate provision of employee support, employer guidance and qualified HR experts directly impacts the experience of staff, so we are very supportive of the report's recommendations to improve that, and to improve on the great work of the current team.

Since the Members' expenses scandal that led to its creation, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has rightfully provided the public with much greater accountability and transparency on MPs' spending; however, the report highlighted some key challenges arising from IPSA's dual responsibilities as a service regulator and a service provider. We support the report's recommendations for IPSA to make changes to the scheme of business costs and expenses, particularly on continuity of employment should staff move between Members' offices. Statutory entitlements such as family leave and redundancy accrued while in the employ of one Member should not evaporate due to a change of Member. It is important that we recognise the previous service of staff, and ensure the continuance of their employment conditions.

Simply put, staff should not be treated as a cost moving between accounts. I note that the report also recommends that the role of staff should be classified as essential supporting work, not merely included on the expense tab of a Member. That alone would go a long way to shift the perception of Members' staff and the hard work that they do supporting both constituents and their employing MP.

We also support the report's recommendations for a working group to be set up in collaboration with IPSA to review the provision of accommodation and to improve the working environment of staff members.

The Speaker's Conference proposals are a welcome set of recommendations that will undeniably improve the culture and working conditions of staff. Across constituency offices, research teams, House and Members' employees, we must ensure that this somewhat atypical structure has typical employment conditions that are both predictable and fair. I certainly hope that Members across the House will support these recommendations.

12 noon

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Having been a member of the Conference, I am delighted to be able to speak in this debate. The Conference has done some important work. We all know that this is a highly individual workplace, and that brings pressures, close and intense working, and a daily range of issues that are varied and challenging. We all know of personnel cases where things have gone wrong, so it was a very good idea to create the Speaker's Conference, and all its members set off on our work knowing there was a problem to solve: that the working conditions of our teams, Members' staff, could and must be improved.

[Andrew Jones]

We have had a very good process, and I thank the House staff for all that they did. In particular, I thank them for their research and for drawing interesting parallels between other Parliaments around the world. It is clear that some of these Parliaments have been on similar journeys to ourselves. It is hard enough to organise things on a national parliamentary basis, but to do so on an international parliamentary basis is particularly challenging.

I think back to a joint meeting with representatives from the Bundestag. The organisation was good: we had to fit in with multiple participants, co-ordinate between sittings and ensure good translation services. I know more about that meeting because I chaired it, but there were many other meetings as well. The way in which House Officers carried out their background research was particularly helpful. For example, there was a visit to my constituency office—among a number of other such visits—to see what happens in the more distant part of the parliamentary estate. We had a visit from the Director of Members' Services, Mr Chris Sear. When he joined us in Harrogate, I made myself scarce by visiting some constituents, so he could talk to the team and find out what they were doing and all that they do to support people on a daily basis.

Throughout this process, I was aware that there had been some difficulty with gathering information. There was plenty of anecdotal information, but problems have been hard to quantify. That difficulty with information meant that, to keep perspective and proportionality in all that we did, we had to constantly remind those involved that the vast majority of MPs are good employers.

There was a focus on three areas: culture, community and behaviour. I will comment, if I may, on a couple of the more important decisions. The first was to keep MPs as employers of their teams and as the deciders of who is in their team. That is a very good thing. Any changes to that would have been difficult to implement and would, I am sure, have met significant resistance. It also became clear very quickly that the way that support is provided or accessed by Members' staff is slightly haphazard, and that that could be improved.

Members' staff can sometimes feel like second-class citizens—for example, when everyone else on the parliamentary estate are eligible for a flu jab, they are not. Listing Members' staff as expenses is demeaning; they are not expenses, they do valuable work. Members' staff could join parliamentary networks.

The transfer of employment rights for staff when they change from working for one MP to another is critical. Effectively, a member of staff has to start all over again when a Member retires or loses their seat, or when a constituency boundary is abolished. That member of staff may have worked here for many years, but they would not have any employment rights. Clearly, that is wrong. As a result of the Conference, that will change, and that transfer of rights was a very early decision.

A further point is the Member Services Team, with a recommendation for significantly greater HR support. Basically, this is about moving everything to a far more professional and standard working arrangement. One area where more is to be done concerns those who are working away from the estate. It is hard to see what is going on in constituency offices—there are 650 or so in diverse locations around our nation—and I was sure

that further work was needed. The parliamentary authorities should work together, alongside the political parties, to identify early where risk may be developing—for example, staff turnover rates could be considered, or basic personnel admin, such as leave records.

During the Conference's work, we spent some time discussing the structure of MPs' offices—possibly because I spent a large amount of time ensuring that we did so. Some are better than others, but how a colleague sets up their office is their business, not mine.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Both he and I are pretty experienced in the private sector in managing people; not everyone has that experience, but I believe that the HR services available to Members are excellent. Will he consider in a future Conference making it a requirement that Members undertake an HR exercise before they are allowed to recruit staff, who will be paid for by the taxpayer?

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely interesting point. The challenge is that when a Member starts here, the work starts immediately, and the period between an election and the workload starting is very brief. What she suggests could be practically difficult, but she is quite correct about possible lack of experience and how standard practices, although they may be difficult to deliver, are clearly the right thing to do. My right hon. Friend makes a very valuable point, which should be considered, because I do not think that this is the end of the process.

Members structure their officers differently. All my team have always been based in Harrogate and Knaresborough; I have never had a team member based in Westminster. London MPs have different needs, probably basing their teams on the parliamentary estate. Most Members will split their teams. A result of our work will be the creation of a series of templates to show new Members what success might look like—not to impose, but to guide—and the provision of more training when they arrive and are setting up their offices.

The absence of imposition is important, because we are all individuals with different needs and different backgrounds, so the political parties have a role to play in the training of new MPs, some of whom as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) says, may have very limited experience, or even none, of being an employer. It is true that this is an individual workplace, but that has sometimes been used as an excuse for not looking hard enough at what happens here, or as a get-out-of-jail card for poor practice. That is not acceptable. We have a set of recommendations; we worked to make sure that they are practical, and there are many of them.

It was a great call by Mr Speaker to create the Conference. I again thank the House team for all their work to support us; they did a very good job. I can confirm to colleagues that, throughout, the Conference's work was done in a constructive, collegiate, cross-party way. Our task now is to implement the findings of the Conference, but I do not think that this work, while positive, should be the only part of an initiative to improve standards in our public life and politics.

Since I became a Member of Parliament, eight current or former Labour MPs have been given custodial sentences, two Conservatives, one Liberal Democrat and one Scottish

Nationalist. We have had by-elections caused by poor behaviour by colleagues from all parts of the House, and there have been cases of bad practice. A series of processes have been introduced in good faith to address problems, but I think it has become apparent that the House needs to do more work to both simplify and speed up the processes. Who is responsible for what? What happens when people are being investigated, and how does that work align with the Recall of MPs Act 2015? It is also for the political parties to recognise problems and act, though.

It is easy to say, “The other lot are corrupt.” We hear that all the time. My point is that the problems are wider and deeper. That is a broader issue than the Speaker’s Conference dealt with. I think our work in this Conference will improve a sizeable part of our political system. It should be supported and implemented as soon as possible.

12.10 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). I too took part in the Speaker’s Conference, and I echo his thanks to the Speaker for setting up the conference, because as we got into our work, it became apparent to us that there was a great deal that needed looking into. I think we went wider than the initial envisaged scope for the conference in many of the things we dealt with.

It is an important step forward, particularly for our staff and the independence of the process, that staff can initiate the process if they feel that they are not being treated in the way they have every right to expect to be by their employer. When we set off, there was quite a strong feeling that we should be employing staff centrally, either under IPSA or some other body set up by the House. However, that idea was quickly dispensed with as it became apparent that, because of the diversity in the way MPs approached doing their jobs, they had to remain the employers and the people who selected those who work in their offices.

There is a very personal relationship and there must be a great deal of trust between MPs and the staff in their offices. It is a particularly close relationship, at times dealing with sensitive and political issues. It is impossible to have an arrangement whereby staff are not directly employed by and responsible to that Member of Parliament. However, that places a great deal of responsibility on us regarding how we go about doing our jobs and ensure that we are good employers. There are good recommendations in this report in relation to that.

I think there will be a working group on MPs’ offices; it is an area where one size does not fit all, and MPs must be allowed flexibility in how they set up offices in their constituency, and whether they do so at all. As has been said, some MPs may just have their staff in Westminster, while others may be hybrid with both a constituency office and people here. That is where I am at the moment, although until covid, all my staff had been placed in my constituency. I welcome the recommendation for further work relating to offices.

It will not surprise anyone who was on the Conference that the main thing I want to speak about is the dreaded IPSA. It is far from my view that the public money I spend on running my office should not be in the public domain. I stand by the fact that transparency is important

in that regard and that I should be accountable for what I do with taxpayers’ money to represent my constituency. I have no problem with that whatsoever. However, IPSA was set up in haste and, were we starting again today, it would not be created. There is no question about that. It cannot perform the dual role of regulator and service provider, and it has not done so very well. I welcome the recommendation from the Conference that IPSA at least takes a good look at itself and tries to separate those roles within its organisation. We need to scrutinise that very closely, because I do not think IPSA is capable of fulfilling both the customer service and regulatory roles.

We went to the Scottish Parliament and looked at the way it arranges its scrutiny of finances and provision of support to Members of the Scottish Parliament. I have to say that the Scottish approach impressed me no end. The people there understood that they were there to assist the MSPs in their role, but none the less there was a set of rules that MSPs had to adhere to. We need to move to a system similar to that. I urge the Speaker or the Leader of the House to continue to scrutinise what IPSA does in response to this report, particularly in separating its customer service and regulatory roles, because that is crucial to improving the way it deals with Members of Parliament.

I will just give one example: the dreaded IPSA web portal. When we asked questions about it, IPSA staff admitted that they had never even thought about the fact that MPs would need to use it when they set it up. You couldn’t make it up. It was like a question and answer session from “The Thick of It”. It is unbelievable that IPSA could have set up a system that was designed for MPs to use and not consider how we might access and use it. The web portal was designed for access by accountants, rather than Members of Parliament. IPSA accepts that it is not an easily usable or accessible system, but it has done very little to improve it—and it does require improvement. That it has taken so long to happen underlines the fact that IPSA has, for far too long, been running a “take it or leave it” service, because it has the regulatory power. It is time that was separated off. My one request in this debate is that we continue to scrutinise that area and that recommendation to make sure that it is implemented properly.

12.16 pm

Penny Mordaunt: I thank all Members who have contributed to this debate, and in particular all Members who took part in the Speaker’s Conference and facilitated its work. I think we have had a welcome and thoughtful debate.

I will briefly answer four points raised. I was asked about the retrospective nature of some of the proposals in the report. Provisions on continuity of service are a matter for IPSA, and although it is unlikely that measures would be applied retrospectively, that will depend on individual circumstances. If people have questions, IPSA is the body to go to for answers.

A couple of hon. Members raised the important matter of training. The Speaker’s Conference looked at various carrots and sticks that could be deployed to ensure that people underwent training—sticks such as not allowing Members access to publicly funded salaries or insurance schemes. However, it decided that it was in no one’s interests for somebody to be unable to access such things, and that that was therefore probably not a stick that could be used.

[Penny Mordaunt]

The House authorities have given a great deal of thought to the question of Members undergoing training. When we arrive in this place, we are very busy, especially in the first few weeks, if we are new Members. Prospective parliamentary candidates are more likely to be keen to undergo training before they get here, so as we approach a general election, the House is considering an enhanced package of training on HR responsibilities, or security matters that Members should be apprised of before they arrive here. The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) talked about IPSA, and there is ongoing work there. I know that all interested parties will continue to scrutinise the work of IPSA and encourage its improvement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) raised a very important point about standards and the duty of care that we all have to one another, not just with regard to our own behaviour, but when we see behaviour from other Members, or from members of staff, that falls short of what should be expected in this place. This is a particularly complicated issue for us here. Members of the public might scratch their head and wonder why, but the fact is that we are not one organisation; we are about 700 organisations of individual offices and employers. We have our political parties and our Whip structures, and we also have our responsibilities under the ministerial code.

That is a very good reason why the Standards Committee is looking at the whole landscape of standards. For my money, I think the answer lies in our all having a clear understanding of our duty of care to one another. No complicated rulebook can ever operate well without an understanding and buy-in from all parties about what a good duty of care to one another looks like.

Finally, on behalf of us all, may I thank all our staff for the tremendous work they do, often in very stressful situations? For example, many offices did incredible work during Op Pitting, which I know was traumatic for a lot of parliamentary staff, who sometimes had to make life and death decisions on behalf of others. I thank again the Speaker's Conference. I hope that all Members will support the motion, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

COP28

12.21 pm

The Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero (Graham Stuart): I beg to move,

That this House has considered COP28.

I am glad to come to the House today to discuss this important subject. We discussed COP28 at a recent reception hosted by the all-party parliamentary group for climate change last month, and also at a recent meeting of the Environmental Audit Committee. I welcome the interest of colleagues from across the Chamber. I note that the all-party parliamentary group on the environment has just released its report on the subject, including nine recommended priorities for COP28. That, too, is a welcome contribution to the debate.

The upcoming conference of the parties, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, comes at a really important moment in tackling the climate crisis. Amid record temperatures and emissions, the first comprehensive stocktake of progress against the Paris agreement at COP28 will show that the world is badly off track. We have made significant progress through the Paris agreement, with temperature projections shifting from a 4° increase before Paris to an increase of between 2.4° and 2.7° after Glasgow, thanks to the nationally determined contributions that countries have said they will make.

But we know that is not enough. In Glasgow, we cemented the goal of limiting global temperature increases to no more than 1.5° and made that our north star, and that has been carried forward by the UAE presidency. The latest science, and the impact that we see even at 1.1°, shows us why that is so important. A top priority for the UK is to leave COP28 with a clear road map to keep a ceiling of 1.5° in reach.

The UK heads to COP28 with a record at home and internationally that is second to none. The Prime Minister recently reaffirmed our commitment to net zero and set out a new approach to get there. This will make it easier for businesses, supply chains and households to adapt to the new normal. We will build on our previous successes and continue to lead.

I am not sure that we are always as good as we should be at sharing this story, of which the nation can be proud. At home, we have decarbonised more than any major economy on this planet, cutting our emissions by 48% since 1990. Not only have we decarbonised faster than any major economy on the planet to date, but we have the most ambitious plans and the most ambitious nationally determined contribution for 2030 of any major economy. Our commitment is to a 68% reduction by 2030. By comparison, the EU, which has been a genuine force for good in this space, has an NDC of 55% by 2030, although it hopes and expects to exceed that. How have we done that? Our inheritance was not a great one. As recently as 2012, nearly 40% of our electricity came from coal. Next year, thanks to the policies of this Government, it will be zero.

We inherited in 2010 an electricity system in which, almost unbelievably, less than 7% of our generation came from renewables. In the first quarter of this year, it was nearly 48%. We have transformed our renewables base. We have eliminated coal. I am aware of no country anywhere that has done more and gone further, faster, but leading in that way is not enough for us, as a

country that produces less than 1% of global emissions, right though it is that we should do so. We also have to lead the global conversation, and that is exactly what we did at COP26. When we took on the presidency of COP26, 30% of global GDP was covered by net zero pledges. When we handed on to Egypt, it was over 90%, and I am proud to say that this country led that conversation.

Not only are we leading, but the rest of the world is accepting the need to act, even if nationally determined contributions and national plans do not yet match what is needed to meet the net zero challenge, but I am pleased to say that ours do. We have ambitious targets, and we will deliver on them. As I said, we have to make sure that the other 99% of global emissions start to follow the same trajectory, so our offer and engagement will be all about encouraging the rest of the world to join the UK on a net zero pathway.

Two years on from Glasgow, the need to accelerate action is more urgent than ever. The world needs to decarbonise more than five times faster than we did in the last two decades. The country in the world that has cut its emissions more than any major economy, namely the UK, has reduced them by 48% in 31 years, but according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the scientific body that advises us on this, the world needs to cut its emissions by 43% by 2030 from a 2019 baseline to keep net zero alive. That shows us the challenge. We need to be peaking globally by 2025.

The latest United Nations framework convention on climate change nationally determined contributions synthesis report shows that emissions are set to be 2% below the 2019 level by 2030 if all the commitments made so far are met—2%, when the science says that we need a 43% reduction. The latest “State of Climate Action” report from the World Resources Institute carries a similarly stark message: we need to accelerate the transition rapidly. Only one of its 42 indicators for the progress needed by 2030 was on track.

We also have to be up front about the fact that we face significant challenges coming into this COP: geopolitical tension, conflict and a challenging macroeconomic context in which Governments are battling inflation and debt. G20 relations are strained, as I witnessed at first hand when I went to the Climate Ministers G20 meeting in Chennai. Some countries are seeking to stoke divisions, to deflect from their own responsibility to take action. At the same time, record temperatures and widespread climate impacts are increasing the need to act on adaptation, loss and damage, as well as reduce emissions. We need broad-based progress across all pillars of the Paris agreement at COP28.

Finance will be a critical part of the transition. Developed economies need to deliver on their promise to mobilise \$100 billion in climate finance for developing countries. We all know that we were due to deliver this in 2020 and, collectively, we fell behind. In Glasgow, we set a course correction to meet the goal by 2023. I am pleased that today’s report from the OECD shows that we are ahead of the projections we set out in Glasgow. We delivered \$89.6 billion in 2021, and the OECD has indicated that it is likely—not definite, but likely—that the \$100 billion goal was in fact met in 2022. Delivery of that commitment is something that the UK has championed,

and I am pleased to say that we recently made our biggest ever climate finance commitment through our \$2 billion contribution to the green climate fund.

There is also an urgent need to realign the financial system so that it is fit to address the challenges we face today, including climate and development. The science is unequivocally clear that urgent action is needed. The vital work done by the IPCC and other scientists makes clear that the risks and impacts we face will grow significantly as temperature increases, including the risk of breaching tipping points, which will accelerate that negative trend.

At COP28, we want to see progress across five areas, the first of which is commitments to keep 1.5° alive. Coming out of the global stocktake, we need renewed consensus and increased ambition to keep 1.5° within reach. We also need a clear, forward-looking road map with a commitment to peak global emissions by 2025; global targets for key sectors, particularly those that are hard to decarbonise; and commitment to action, including through initiatives such as the breakthrough agenda and in other key areas such as forests, the phasing out of hydrofluorocarbons and clear guidance for the next round of NDCs, which will be a central feature of the Belém COP in the Amazon in two years’ time.

The second area is clear progress towards a clean energy future, including a commitment to triple global renewable energy deployment and double energy efficiency by 2030. That sits alongside a clear commitment on phasing out unabated fossil fuels—our position on that issue is unchanged since the G7 commitment that the UK helped to deliver earlier this year—and to phase out coal power, building on COP26 outcomes.

The third area is reform of the international financial institutions to unlock trillions for global challenges including development and climate action, and delivery of our existing commitments, alongside \$100 billion per year in climate finance for developing economies. As I have mentioned previously, the OECD’s latest report on 2021 figures shows that developed countries are on track to meet that goal.

The fourth area is improving adaptation to climate change, delivering on our Glasgow commitment to double adaptation finance by 2025, and establishing an effective loss and damage fund to support countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. We are pleased that the transitional committee that was set up to reach agreement on what that loss and damage fund should look like has put forward a recommendation to COP28. The UK was instrumental in securing that recommendation, and we hope it will be agreed by all parties at COP28. We will continue to advocate for the priorities of the most vulnerable: we held a third climate and development ministerial at the pre-COP event last month in Abu Dhabi, which I co-chaired, to do just that.

The fifth area is that we want real progress towards protecting, restoring and sustainably managing nature—for example, by making concrete progress on the historic agreement we landed to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.

Action to deliver net zero is not just a matter of doing the right thing, or of avoiding harm: it is crucial to our security and prosperity here in the UK, both now and in the future. The global net zero transition could be worth £1 trillion to UK businesses between 2021 and

[Graham Stuart]

2030. UK businesses are in the vanguard of recognising the opportunity that springs from net zero: over two thirds of FTSE 100 companies and thousands of small businesses have pledged to reduce their emissions in line with the 1.5° target under the Race To Zero campaign. Over half of the signatories to that campaign are from the UK.

Net zero is already an engine for growth and revitalisation of formerly deindustrialised areas in the UK. We are a leader across a number of areas: we have the world's five largest offshore wind farm projects and the world's No. 1 ranked green finance centre, and we are leading the way in developing an approach to carbon capture and storage, to name a few examples. Action on climate and nature is also crucial for our energy security and to reduce exposure to future global shocks, such as those caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The North sea's transition to a clean energy powerhouse with 50GW of offshore wind by 2030 will reduce exposure to volatile international energy markets and be an engine for clean energy exports. Action on adaptation and nature is crucial in a world where food security is increasingly under threat.

However, we need everyone with us on this journey. The opportunities are huge: in 2023, we will see a record \$1.8 trillion invested in clean energy alone. According to the International Energy Agency, electric vehicles are on track to account for two thirds of new car sales globally by 2030; the transition to clean energy and electric vehicles is taking off, and it will spread to other sectors quickly. At COP28, we need to show progress on delivering the historic agreement we landed in Glasgow. We must use UK expertise to scale green finance, support others to accelerate the transition in key sectors of the global economy, and set a clear pathway to 1.5°. At this point, I am happy to hear from other Members.

12.35 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Simon Stiell, the UN climate executive secretary, said at COP27 that we need

“everybody, everywhere in the world, every single day, doing everything they possibly can to address the climate crisis.”

That is the scale of the challenge ahead of us, and the global stocktake synthesis report has underlined what is at stake. We are falling short on mitigation, adaptation and finance. Current NCDs are 20 to 24 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent short of what is needed to limit warming to 1.5°. The conclusion is stark: there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all. Indeed, in meetings I have had recently with climate scientists, they have warned that although they want to cling to the hope of keeping 1.5° alive, they fear we are now in the territory of 2°. At 2°, we lose our coral reefs, for example; that is not a solution that we should be happy to live with. Echoing Simon Stiell, the global stocktake report states that

“much more action, on all fronts and by all actors, is needed now”.

One would not know it from the speech that the Minister has just made, but we do not have a Government who are taking the action on all fronts that is needed now: we have a Government who are not just stalling, but taking us backwards. I thought it was quite a cheek

for the Minister to cite electric vehicles, given that the Government have just rowed back from the 2030 ban on the sale of new internal combustion engine vehicles. The motor manufacturing sector, including the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Ford motor company, was quite happy with that 2030 date. The only reason that date was moved was that in the wake of the Uxbridge by-election, the Prime Minister wanted to play party politics with net zero. The Minister is quite audacious at times: he said that some countries were seeking to stoke division at COP, but that is exactly what his Government have been doing in recent weeks on net zero.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): The rest of the European Union has set the deadline of 2035. It was right that the United Kingdom Government set the ambition for 2030, but we recognise that things are changing: we have had covid, and there is still a need to roll out infrastructure. I think the hon. Lady is being ungenerous, since we will now be in line with the rest of the European Union, and we have a higher take-up of EVs than many other countries.

Kerry McCarthy: In all the conversations I have with businesses, they say that they want certainty and a strategic sense of direction; they want to know where they are going, so we should not move the goalposts. There was no reason to row back from that target, and as I have said, the motor industry itself has expressed concern. That industry needs to develop a market in new vehicles now, so that in a few years' time, we will have the affordable second-hand market that we need so that people can afford to make the transition. The right hon. Lady is absolutely right that the infrastructure is not there, but that is a challenge that we should rise to, getting a comprehensive network of public sector charging points, grid connections and so on. She will have heard that from Labour at its recent party conference.

Let me turn to domestic progress. Again, to listen to the Minister, one would think that everything was going swimmingly. The Climate Change Committee has assessed that the UK is unlikely to meet its NDC to reduce emissions by 68% between 1990 and 2030. The Government's own carbon budget delivery plan conceded that Ministers only have plans for 92% of our NDC, but they have said that they are confident about delivering those emissions savings—that is something we often hear from the Minister, without any actual detail about how we will get there. In fact, it has been assessed that the Government have credible plans for only 28% of the required emissions reduction. There is a lot of work to be done.

The Climate Change Committee assessed the Government's policies in October with and without the Prime Minister's climate climbdown, and found a 20% increase in the proportion of the NDC pathway covered by “insufficient plans” having taken into account the Prime Minister's intervention. It said that the

“widespread uncertainty for consumers and supply chains”, is more difficult to quantify, but, as I have said, at all the meetings I have had, people are saying that this has absolutely knocked them off course. There is a huge amount of enthusiasm for going down the path to net zero and I am told that there is a lot of private sector finance ready to invest, but they need a stable economic climate, not a Prime Minister who is U-turning just when action is needed.

Following the disastrous contracts for difference auction, the proportion of the electricity supply pathway with significant risks increased by over 5,000%. The refusal to help renters contributed to a fivefold increase in insufficient plans for buildings. When the Government's policies are, as the Climate Change Committee found, "making Net Zero considerably harder to achieve"

and driving up energy bills, how can Ministers go to COP trying to boast about how well things are going in the UK? I do hope for action before COP. We have the autumn statement next week, and we were expecting some plans—I think the Chancellor promised in the spring that he would bring them forward—in response to the Inflation Reduction Act and the measures we then saw in the EU. I hope that we do get something on that front to at least reassure businesses that the Government still have net zero in their sights and see it as an important part of a future industrial strategy for us.

The UK used to be at the forefront of global climate action, and again the Minister was being a bit cheeky when talking about the progress that has been made since 2010. I think he entered Parliament when I did in 2005. Is that right?

Graham Stuart *indicated assent.*

Kerry McCarthy: The Minister may recall being on the Green Benches in 2008 when the Labour Government introduced the world's first Climate Change Act, which was then adopted by more than 100 countries around the world. It was groundbreaking.

Graham Stuart: If the hon. Lady wants to have a history lesson—and we did, indeed, come in together—she will remember that it was David Cameron, as the leader of the Conservatives, who was the first leader of a major party in this country to call for a climate Act. I think the Liberal Democrats leader followed suit a few hours later, and the Labour Government then eventually did so. I served on the Joint Committee, chaired by the brilliant David Puttnam, that put this into place, so I will not take any lectures from her. It was the Conservatives who led the charge to get that going—the first major party to support it—and I was pleased to see it put on the statute book. We were of course the first major economy in the world, and the first Government, to legislate for net zero overall.

Kerry McCarthy: It was a Labour Climate Change Act brought in by the now shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). I can see why the Minister may be desperate to try to claim credit for it, because the Government have so little else that they can claim credit for, but it was a Labour Act introduced by a Labour Government. It is because that was enacted that we have seen so much progress, and as I have said, it was taken as a model for many other countries to follow. However, we are now setting entirely the wrong example to other countries by scaling back on our net zero ambition and last year the Prime Minister had to be forced to attend COP.

Graham Stuart: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kerry McCarthy: The Minister will have an opportunity to respond in his wind-up at the end, but I suppose I will give way once more.

Graham Stuart: This is a really important topic, and it is important that we get our language right. The Government have not scaled back our net zero ambitions for either our NDC in 2030 or net zero by 2050. The hon. Lady can make lots of points, partisan or otherwise, but it would be great if she acknowledged that this country has, under this Conservative Government, cut emissions by more than any other major economy on earth and has the most ambitious plans for 2030.

Kerry McCarthy: The Minister will also know that the Government had to be taken to court, because it is one thing declaring targets and ambitions, but unless they have the strategy—[*Interruption.*] The Government were taken to court, and that is why they had to produce the delivery plan earlier this year. The Climate Change Committee, which by his account was all his idea because it was all his idea to introduce the Climate Change Act, has said that the Government are not on track to meet their ambitions. So the Minister cannot just rely on grandiose boasts about where he wants to get us to if he does not have a plan to get us there, and it is very clear that he does not have a plan to get us there.

The Minister said that we represent only 1% of global emissions, which is true, but the NDC emissions gap is approximately the total combined annual emissions from the top three emitting countries. Yes, they have responsibilities, but this does need everybody everywhere to play their part. I do not think we would want to try to suggest that we were insignificant in the big global picture because we represent only 1% of the total population.

I will move on specifically to the COP agenda and what we hope to see. Will the UK be calling for the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels, and does the Minister agree with the global stocktake report—[*Interruption.*] I am just about to come to that. I know the Minister mentioned it, but does he agree with the global stocktake report that fossil fuel subsidies are stifling cost-effective low-carbon alternatives? The global stocktake report states that

"lifetime emissions from existing and planned fossil fuel infrastructure will exceed estimates for keeping...1.5 °C within reach".

My point is that, if the UK will be calling for the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels, how does he think going to COP when the Government have just announced the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill in the King's Speech will sit when he tries to lecture other countries on moving away from fossil fuels?

The global stocktake report is clear that CO₂ removals have a role, but are

"not a substitute for deep emissions reduction."

It states:

"A rapid reduction of the world economy's reliance on fossil fuels towards clean energy is central for reaching global net zero".

That sounds to me like an endorsement of Labour's clean energy mission for 2030. Unlike the Government's short-term approach, this will increase our energy security, create good jobs and reduce energy bills—unlike, as the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero admitted the other day, the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill—and it will mean that the UK is leading the world in tackling the climate crisis.

[Kerry McCarthy]

The Minister mentioned nature-based solutions, and I was very pleased to hear that, but can he say a bit more about what global action the Government will be supporting with sustainable land management—I understand that that will be on the agenda at COP in a way that it has not been in the past—as well as terrestrial and ocean carbon sequestration? What discussions are there likely to be on the role of setting up credible international carbon markets? To give one example, we know that wetlands have huge potential, but we are still waiting to hear about the saltmarsh code—the former Secretary of State for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), may have something to say about that—and whether we can add saltmarshes to the greenhouse gas inventory. With the UK's leading position as a world financial centre, we are ideally placed to be playing a role in creating these markets both on the nature side and on the carbon side.

It is estimated that tree loss last year was 2.1% higher than the maximum level. Will the Minister update us on that? He mentioned halting and reversing deforestation by 2030, and on the international side that is very much about stamping out links to deforestation in our supply chains. Could he give an update on how that is going, because as I understand it, it is not going well? Those issues were all highlighted in the global stocktake.

The built environment and transport are also on the COP agenda, and it would be helpful if the Minister could tell us a little more about the Government's priorities for the talks. He mentioned the loss and damage fund, and the work of the transitional committee. It would be interesting to know more about what conversations he has had with climate-vulnerable countries, and the small island developing states in particular, because it is one thing to set up these financial arrangements, but in the past the smaller a country, the fewer resources it has, and it finds it very difficult to access the finance that is out there.

The Minister also mentioned the need to reform international financial institutions, which was welcome. I do not know whether he intends to reveal much about his actual agenda at COP before he goes—and it would be useful to know who else is going with him—but one question that has been asked of me is whether he will be attending the ministerial event on methane on 4 December. I think it is really important that we start addressing methane in connection both with the fossil fuel sector and with agriculture and waste. I hope that will be a priority for him.

To conclude, the UN has previously warned that the world is on course for a catastrophic 2.8°C of warming, in part because promises made at COP26 and COP27 have not been fulfilled. We are running out of last chances, but we can still avert the very worst of it, because we have the knowledge and tools to do so; it is just the willpower that is lacking at the moment.

The UK under Labour will, as called for in the global stocktake, transform our energy system with a plan to double onshore wind, treble solar, and quadruple offshore wind. Our warm homes plans will see 90 million cold and draughty homes brought up to standard, and Labour's answer to the Inflation Reduction Act will restore Britain's international leadership and create jobs across the country.

Our proposals for a clean power alliance will lead ambitious countries and support the most vulnerable. A net zero target should not lead to complacency. There is so much more that the UK can and must do, not only to reduce emissions but to deliver energy security, reduce energy bills, and enable British industry to thrive over the long term. That is the vision we need to see at COP.

12.50 pm

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. COP28 will be vital, recognising the global stocktake that will be happening, and I commend the Government on the progress they have made, while also recognising, not just in this country but around the world, the necessity of a just transition.

I pay tribute to the Prime Minister, who in his speech a couple of months ago recognised that we have already been doing so well on aspects of the carbon budget. He also recognised some of the impacts that were about to unfold, particularly in rural communities like mine in Suffolk Coastal, including a transition away from oil boilers—something that we all want. He is allowing more time for that to happen, rather than the sudden impact that such measures could have had on many people in my constituency and across the country. His speech was also about aspects of housing and the energy performance certificate. Undoubtedly, in many rural parts of the country, trying to achieve EPC standard C is difficult, because there is pretty old housing—not just from 20 or 30 years ago, but considerably older. Trying to make that change meant that a lot of buildings were at risk of being removed from the private rental sector, which would not be good in terms of housing people in our rural communities.

I also commend the Prime Minister on saying, in a key part of his speech at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh last year, that there is no solution to climate change without protecting and restoring nature. That is 100% right. Again, the United Kingdom should be proud of how it has put nature, and nature-based solutions, at the heart of ensuring that we achieve net zero around the world.

In her 1988 speech, my political heroine Margaret Thatcher highlighted the risk to the world of climate change. She was pivotal in ensuring that the Montreal protocol, and its subsequent amendments, was an innovative way—indeed, the most successful agreement ever reached—to try to tackle climate change. The Kigali amendment to the Montreal protocol was ratified by this Parliament in 2017, and I was pleased to be the DEFRA Minister who led that ratification. The critical outcome of that is to try to prevent 0.5°C of warming, which will help. Indeed, that is the single biggest contribution that will be made towards keeping the goal of 1.5° alive.

This is about how we tackle the issue in a variety of ways, in particular how we use hydrofluorocarbons—in the past it was chlorofluorocarbons—and thinking about the global warming power of the different chemicals we use. In my constituency, GAH Transport has been in operation for 30 years. It is a small business, but it is really making an impact with the amount of research and innovation that it is undertaking to try to use more of the sorts of chemical that reduce global warming potential. That will be an important part of the innovation we need not just in this country but around the world. I am delighted that the UK Government are funding,

through international climate finance and other aspects of official development assistance, important progress in India and Rwanda. That is important progress in the cooling challenges that those countries face, not only when heating or cooling homes, but also—particularly in Rwanda, working with other African nations nearby—when thinking about the impact on agriculture, and how we can try to reduce food waste. We are supporting that important innovation to ensure that we keep the goal of 1.5° alive.

I have one request for the Minister. The United Arab Emirates, which is taking up the COP28 presidency, has not ratified the Kigali amendment, and I encourage him to raise that with the COP28 President and Ministers for that country to see whether they can do that. We need leadership across the world. The amendment is already in effect because a sufficient number of countries have signed, but it would show further leadership from the UAE to undertake that important ratification.

I admit that I am a bit of a veteran of COPs. I went to COP23 in Bonn in 2017, and to COP24 in Katowice. We had the magnificent COP26 in Glasgow, with our own president, my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Sir Alok Sharma). In many ways that was a game changer for nature, and it was strengthened last year at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh. Going back to Bonn, nature was really the Cinderella of it all. The oceans—we were already seeing the change, and the impact of climate change; we were starting to see acidification. Although the seas are still alkaline, they are getting more acidic, and it is important to recognise that power and how nature has helped us.

Oceans have effectively been absorbing so much carbon that the impacts—what that is doing to nature—are now starting to become clear. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) mentioned the bleaching of coral reefs and the potential loss of those reefs, and it is important that nature goes hand in hand with climate strategy. I am delighted that the UK Government have made that a key part of what we do.

On other aspects of nature, the Minister and I have attended a variety of international meetings. Most recently we were together in India for the G20, and I was with the former Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), in Japan at the G7. It has been an important part of that journey that we work globally with partners. To some extent, that has been the secret of what made the Montreal protocol work so well. Funding was given to try to help countries around the world with that innovation and transition. Some of those things are not straightforward. For example, right beneath us we have the tube system, and the way that some of these chemicals or gases were used in the past has been a key part of some of our own infrastructure. We need to change away from that, in particular by not using sulphur hexafluoride any more, or by reducing it and phasing it down as far as we can. It is important that we share our understanding and technology, and that is why what I said about India and Rwanda is an important part of making that happen.

Thinking a little more broadly, I will briefly touch on my time at the Department for Work and Pensions. I do so because I know that a lot of these measures will need financing. We made an important decision to make reporting to the Task Force on Climate-related Financial

Disclosures mandatory when it comes to pensions. If we think about the trillions of pounds of assets that are in global business and being invested, it makes sense for businesses to think ahead about the impact of climate change, and for investors to do so as well. That does not mean that things will happen overnight. Businesses must be conscious of what the impact of climate change will be, and frankly they need to start financing to try to mitigate that impact or adapt towards it. As a slight aside, I welcome the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures, and I hope I can persuade the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions to adopt that in future as well.

In order to ensure that we achieve net zero by 2050, we do have to think of the planet—of course we do—and we have to think of people. A lot of this is quite an uncomfortable transition and a change to a way of life, and we must make it as straightforward as possible. I also know that we can be prosperous as a consequence of these changes, whether that is through green jobs in the UK, or ensuring that instead of spending lots of money on having to adapt, mitigate or deal with crises in different parts of the world, we build such measures into our systematic way of growing globally in terms of our prosperity. That is why it is so important that the £11.5 billion of international climate finance is still a key part of the Government's strategy.

My constituency contains a nuclear power station, Sizewell B. It was home to Sizewell A, which is now being decommissioned, and planning consent has been given for Sizewell C. It really matters for our energy supply that we have a mix. There is also a lot of offshore wind in the southern North sea. The impact on the onshore infrastructure required to bring that into our network is a source of much concern in Suffolk, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is well aware of that. I will not dwell on that—I intend to bring it up another time—but to take the national and global position, we need to work out how we will make that transition fair, thinking of the impact on communities and on nature. I know that my right hon. Friend is wise about those matters.

The shadow Minister referred to the greenhouse gases inventory. I agree that we should look to bring saltmarsh, woodlands and so on into the inventory. I am delighted that DEFRA's chief scientific adviser, Dr Gideon Henderson, is undertaking that work. I wish him well and hope he will be able to work at pace. I will shortly talk about mangroves—my favourite, they are magic and it would not be a speech from me if I did not talk about them—and we have to recognise that saltmarsh is our equivalent of mangroves. In my time previously in DEFRA and in the past year, I tried but did not quite get there—I really need the Marine Management Organisation to work much more collaboratively with Natural England and the Environment Agency to make it more straightforward to plant saltmarsh. There have been too many complications with licensing in different ways, and it is very frustrating. Like mangroves, saltmarsh is multipurpose. It can sequester carbon, it can be a good flood defence, and it is a brilliant habitat for many of the migratory wading birds that come to our shores. I am very keen that we make good progress on making that happen.

On emissions, I want to thank Robert Caudwell who did a report for DEFRA on lowland peat and the impact of farming and agriculture. I wrote the foreword

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

to the Government's response earlier this year and welcomed the investment towards tackling the emissions, because it is a significant amount. It is of course important that we have food security, but we also need to tackle emissions from agriculture in a measured way. Wider work on the restoration of peatlands has been a passion of mine for several years.

My right hon. Friend mentioned deforestation, which was one of the key elements of COP26 in the leaders' pledge, various declarations and the coalition of ambitions. I am known for wanting to make sure we turn ambitions into action, and I know that the House will share that thought. I was, therefore, delighted that we were able to contribute to the Amazon Fund, which will help Brazil in particular. That was announced by the Prime Minister earlier this year. Progress is being made on getting the forest risk commodities legislation ready, and I hope it will be laid before the House before too long. It is important that as we make these changes we do our best to reduce deforestation and our demands through supply chains, and I commend the companies that have already made those changes. There is more to do, and I hope more will be done very shortly.

Nature-based solutions can be symbiotic and provide much more value for money in achieving what we want to achieve. It has not always been the case that actions taken to reduce carbon have been beneficial to the environment. That is not a criticism. The dash for diesel had other impacts, especially with particulate matter 2.5. People did not know at the time, but we should recognise now that the dash for diesel had an impact on other aspects of the environment and it is important that we consider both as we make further changes.

I have a particular passion for mangroves. I tried to brand them "blue forests" to make them a bit more accessible around the world, but they are magical. They are magic because, bang for buck, they are better at carbon sequestration than the Amazon forests. They have been in place for a long time, but they are also under threat, because they make brilliant wood for building homes and boats. I commend countries such as Mozambique that have put in national protections. We should think about how much of the Commonwealth has mangroves, because at the moment they do not get rewarded for the protections they have put in place.

Communities do understand; it is not just about carbon. What is magic about mangroves is that they provide a brilliant place to develop aquaculture. The fishing industries locally can be sustainable because of the opportunities for the growth of fish stock and protection from other predators, just by the nature of the mangroves. They also have an impact on coastal erosion and protection. Haiti in the Caribbean suffered a devastating hurricane some years ago, but, while the areas with mangroves were still damaged, they were the quickest to recover. That is why I am on a mission, and will continue to be so as long as I have breath, to champion mangroves whether in this House or as I regularly did in ministerial meetings around the world.

The magic of mangroves needs to be recognised more, and that is why I was pleased that for COP28 the UAE made a commitment to plant more mangroves. My right hon. Friend the Minister and I went different ways after the G20 in Chennai, and I had the privilege

of visiting the second largest mangrove forest in the world at Pichavaram, and it was exceptionally special. I love that the community also recognises how special the forest is and how important it is to protect it. I am conscious that other parts of the world have had a slash and burn approach in the past to generate other aspects of the economy, but now Governments and communities have recognised the importance of stopping deforestation, as my right hon. Friend mentioned.

On the history of climate change, I give credit to the Labour Government who introduced the Climate Act 2008, and we took a generally cross-party approach to it. David Cameron introduced "vote blue, go green" and was really behind the change. The Act legislated for an 80% reduction by 2050, and it was actually my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), when she was Prime Minister, who made the change to a 100% reduction by law. Those legal targets matter. We should also recognise that it was Boris Johnson who really made a difference at COP26. He brought nature and the world together to make sure that we would keep up the momentum.

There is no doubt in my mind that covid was a bit of a body-check to progress on many environmental matters, but it is important that we keep accelerating, and I wish my right hon. Friend the Minister well at COP28. I know that several Ministers are going, including Lord Benyon from DEFRA and my successor as the Secretary of State. It matters that we are there. We need to bring others with us, but they will not come with us if we just attack what they do.

Just last week, I was in Beijing where I met Minister Huang, the president of the Committee on Biological Diversity that led to the immense global biodiversity framework agreed last December in Montreal. We have to work with China and with other countries—I think in particular of Minister Yadav in India. I was able to explain what I thought was the Prime Minister's just transition, but we certainly cannot reduce our ambition; we have to work with other countries, and challenge them but bring them along, because it matters that everybody makes their commitment.

It does not matter if the United Kingdom or any other country is the first to reach net zero—what matters is when the last country hits net zero. We need to ensure that as many countries as possible achieve that by 2050, if not before, and I wish my right hon. Friend the Minister well in the negotiations. I know there is ambition in our thinking about some of the different approaches that need to be taken. I hope that he will also be key to the Commonwealth playing its part. At the UN General Assembly, I was delighted to chair the first meeting of Commonwealth Ministers for environment and climate, and there was certainly ambition there. Let us turn that into action. I have great confidence in my right hon. Friend making that happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):
I call the SNP spokesperson.

1.11 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I will start with a short reality check. Climate scientists are forecasting with near certainty that 2023 will set a new record as the hottest year. October global temperatures

soared 1.7°C above the late-1800s average for that month. According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, September 2023 surpassed the average July temperatures from 2001 to 2010. Those records are not merely being broken but being shattered. Heatwaves, droughts and floods have resulted in significant human suffering, claiming thousands of lives, disrupting livelihoods and displacing scores of people.

The burden of these climatic shifts falls disproportionately on those regions and communities that have contributed least to the crisis. East Africa, a region with minimal contribution to global carbon emissions, has faced devastating drought and famine, with estimates earlier this year suggesting that two lives were being lost every minute. Meanwhile, low-lying nations such as Tuvalu facing the real threat of extinction in the coming decades are creating digital back-ups of their entire existence and culture, complete with ancestral knowledge and value systems.

As we approach COP28, it is therefore encouraging—although long overdue—that the conference will focus more on frontline communities, and especially those in least developed countries and small islands. That emphasis must translate into tangible financial support. That is an area where Scotland has set a precedent as the first country in the global north to commit funds to climate loss and damage, pledging £2 million at COP26. Last year, the Scottish Government allocated an additional £5 million to non-economic loss and damage, supporting initiatives preserving the heritage of affected communities. Those sums are, of course, small compared with what is required globally. Finance provided by rich countries to help the poorest deal with climate change remains woefully inadequate. However, the Scottish Government's action has encouraged others to follow, with about \$300 million thought to have been pledged globally to address loss and damage.

At COP27, a landmark agreement was reached to establish a dedicated fund aimed explicitly at supporting vulnerable nations and communities who are grappling with the irreversible effects of climate change. That action must be accelerated, and the finance offered must be additional to that already available for mitigation and adaptation—and it must be in the form of grants not loans. Support for adaptation initiatives is simply inadequate.

Countries of the global north not only bear a substantial responsibility for the destructive consequences of climate change through our emissions but have benefited from the competitive advantages that the early adoption of fossil fuels and industrialisation provided. Therefore, surely wealthy nations have a moral obligation to recognise that historical responsibility and lead by example. First Minister Humza Yousaf and Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition Máiri McAllan, who will represent Scotland at the conference, will make that case to delegates.

Action to address loss and damage gets to the heart of what we mean by climate justice. It is a principle that is equally important at home as it is globally. The Scottish Government are committed to ending our reliance on fossil fuels in a way that is fair and leaves no one behind. That is exemplified by the just transition fund: the Scottish Government's 10-year, £500 million investment to support projects in the north-east and Moray as those regions transition to net zero. The principles of a

just transition are also enshrined in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019, emphasising the creation of green, sustainable jobs and addressing economic inequality.

The actions needed to reach net zero by 2045 will transform all sectors of our economy and society, and will require rapid structural change. In Scotland, and indeed throughout the UK, we have seen how unplanned structural changes in the past have left intergenerational scarring and deprivation, most notably in our former coalmining communities. Our transition to net zero must be managed differently.

In October alone, we have experienced two extreme rainfall events, including Storm Babet, which disrupted transport, destroyed infrastructure and crops, led to the evacuation of communities, and tragically took lives in Scotland and across the UK. The health of our environment, economy and society is interlinked with how well we mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts. That is why the Scottish Government are making an extra £150 million available in this parliamentary term on top of £42 million annually for flood risk management, and £12 million on coastal adaptation.

The Scottish Government's climate change plan update outlines nearly 150 policies, setting a pathway to meet our ambitious emissions targets by 2032, including a 75% reduction by 2030. We have reached significant milestones. In 2020, almost 100% of Scotland's gross electricity consumption in Scotland was generated from renewable sources. Although the Scottish Government have met targets and missed others, at the last count the Government missed their annual emissions target by only 1.2%. That tells us two things. The actions of the Scottish Government are helping us to track very closely to where we need to be against the backdrop of some of the most stretching targets in the world. Equally, there is a great deal left to do.

Of course, the delivery of Scotland's climate ambitions is also contingent on action by the UK Government in reserved and shared areas, and that certainly has not been helped by the Prime Minister's recent abandonment of key net zero commitments. The sheer scale of his policy reversals may have a significant impact on Scotland, not least in the preparation of our own draft climate change plan. I am afraid that the King's Speech only deepened those concerns. The problems with the announced new licensing system have been highlighted by both climate scientists and anti-poverty campaigners, so I do not need to go into them, but analysis from earlier this year showed that new oil and gas fields in the North sea will produce only enough gas to meet the UK's needs for a few weeks a year. If the Government were serious about strengthening the UK's energy security and bringing down people's energy bills, they would start by announcing robust measures to incentivise investments in renewables. I think in particular of tidal stream—I speak about that regularly in this House—similar to what we are seeing from the EU and the US, as well as matching the Scottish Government's £500 million just transition fund.

People in Scotland are rightly asking how it is possible that they are facing unaffordable energy bills when in 2020 Scotland produced enough renewable energy to power the equivalent of every household in the country for more than three years. They are also wondering why in a country where we produce six times more gas than we consume, Age Scotland's figures suggest that a scandalous 50% of people aged 55 to 64 are living in fuel poverty.

[Deidre Brock]

We are also seeing the damaging impact of Brexit on environmental protections and standards, which Members on the SNP Benches warned of repeatedly. The Tories' Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 threatens the high standards that Scotland enjoyed as an EU member, before we were removed against the wishes of the clear majority of people in our country. Just this week, we heard the UK Government's plans to reduce the safety information required from chemical companies to register substances to an irreducible minimum. The UK's registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—UK REACH—is already falling behind the EU's regulations, and that move will only heighten the risk of toxic substances entering the environment.

In the realm of national security, the Defence Committee's recent report on climate change found that the Ministry of Defence could do much more to measure and reduce its carbon emissions without eroding military capability.

Dr Coffey: I hear what the hon. Lady says about chemicals; the Government are planning to produce a new chemicals strategy. She may not be aware that the European Union refused to allow the United Kingdom access to all the information on REACH. The cost of replicating exactly the same information is huge. She needs to be mindful that we are trying to support business, while recognising that the European Union could have given us access and refused to do so.

Deidre Brock: That is just another complication caused by Brexit, which has been a disaster for the UK.

As I mentioned, in the realm of national security, the Defence Committee has taken a close interest for some time, so it seems that some sort of environmental audit would be appropriate for Ministry of Defence activities.

Whoever wins the next election faces a long road to rectify the decisions of the current Government. Hon. Members should not take my word for it, but it does not bode well for the UK's standing on the climate crisis ahead of COP28. Lord Deben, the former chair of the Climate Change Committee, said in the summer that by failing to act decisively in response to the energy crisis and building on the success of hosting COP26, the UK has lost its claim to global climate leadership.

To restore influence and authority ahead of COP28, the Prime Minister should take heed of the letter from the all-party parliamentary group for climate change, which Members from different parties across the Chamber have signed. It calls on the Prime Minister to appoint a Secretary of State-level UK climate envoy ahead of COP28, after the Government scrapped the role of special representative on climate change within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. We want the UK Government to support climate-vulnerable countries by committing new and additional grant-based finance to the loss and damage fund, and championing a just global energy transition by engaging with affected workers and supporting other countries to fairly move away from fossil fuels.

As we all know, the Paris agreement binds countries to stop the planet heating by 1.5° by the end of the century. However, current policies are set to heat it by about 2.4°. That trajectory spells disaster for the planet. We must play our part in reversing it immediately.

1.23 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for water, sanitation and hygiene, I declare an interest relevant to this debate and to the future of our globe. I am honoured to be part of this debate on such an important issue. No other important issue is raised so many times by young people when I visit schools in Putney, Southfields and Roehampton, and by the many members of the Putney Environment Commission, which I set up shortly after I was elected for local people interested in taking action on climate internationally, nationally and locally. Last night we had a meeting about what we can do to rewild local streets in London, and are looking forward to playing our part in action before and after the United Nations climate change conference, COP28. I will attend the conference, with a delegation of 10 MPs. It is important that parliamentarians are at the conference, meeting experts and activists who are all working towards ensuring a green future and the action on climate and nature that is so important for our long-term survival.

This year, 2023, will be the hottest year on record. Every day we witness the climate crisis unfold, from the effects of El Niño to the UK battered by storm after storm. Currently, between 3.3 billion and 3.6 billion people live in areas that are highly vulnerable to climate change. The world's poorest people, including women and girls so often on the frontline, are paying the highest price. Under current estimates, we face a 40% shortfall in fresh water by 2030—not very far away. Water scarcity is escalating, which affects trade, economies, poverty reduction, food and nutrition, but also migration—an issue that is a subject of many debates in this House and will only be exacerbated by climate change. That is the tip of the iceberg. The disruption and damage that the climate crisis causes and will cause to all our lives cannot be overstated. As the Minister said, the world is badly off track to agreeing the Paris agreement targets and keeping 1.5° alive.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) mentioned mangrove forests. I am also a fan, having been to visit mangrove forests in Bangladesh when I worked for Water Aid. I had the privilege of visiting a coastal community in Bangladesh, where the climate crisis is already extremely real. It used to be a freshwater area where people survived by fishing, but it has been salinated. I sat with a group of women in that rural area where they could not harvest or grow anything—there was nothing they could do. They wanted to move anywhere else, but were stuck in an area that seemed arid, like a desert from the future, where climate change was making such an impact on communities. I have said many times that climate change is not something that will happen to us; it is happening now. That was understood by the recent COPs, but needs to be understood even more. If we are too late, there will be no concrete action to effect change at the scale we need.

The main outcome needed at COP28 is obvious: an agreement for no new fossil fuels. Many organisations such as the International Energy Agency have said that to achieve global net zero emissions by the year 2050, there should be no new fossil fuel extraction projects beyond those already committed. How can the Government believe that approving more than 100 new North sea oil and gas projects is in any way in line with that, the legal frameworks or the views of the vast majority of voters? As other countries forge ahead with renewables, the UK

is lagging behind. We need to keep it in the ground, it is very simple. Unless we and other countries get this right, there will not be the progress we need.

Climate justice is very important. Making sure that lower and middle-income countries can respond to climate impacts is essential. I hope that will be one of the biggest outcomes of COP28. In 2009, rich Governments agreed to provide \$100 billion in climate finance annually to developing countries. But that goal, which originally was meant to be fulfilled by 2020, has still not been met. The £11.6 billion adaptation and mitigation finance that the UK pledged in 2019 is more loan-based than grant-based, and so only increases debt for the world's most indebted countries.

Graham Stuart: Some 85% of our climate finance is grant-based.

Fleur Anderson: I am very glad to hear that. That needs to be the future, because grant-based instead of loan-based is vital. I am glad that there have been changes along the way, as a result of a lot of campaigning.

I highlight five areas of concern. First, on phasing out fossil fuels, the UK Government must play their part in ending the fossil fuel era by committing to cease direct and indirect funding of overseas fossil fuel projects, including those financed by British international investment, and instead committing to rapidly scaling up investment in renewable energy at home. Secondly, on the loss and damage fund, Governments at COP28 must commit to designing a loss and damage fund with adequate grant-based funding arrangements and specific plans to support countries facing economic and non-economic losses and damage. The polluters must pay. The fossil fuel industry is posting record profits, but it should be paying for the damage it is causing. The UK Government must commit to providing their fair share of funding through grant-based funding arrangements, and should have specific plans to support countries that face both economic and non-economic losses and damages.

The third concern is the need to fulfil climate finance pledges. The UK Government must meet their own climate finance commitments with additional, new funds, not by re-badging finance already given to British International Investment or the World Bank. The fourth concern is the need to reform the global food system in order to tackle the climate crisis. Action on food and action by farmers go hand-in-hand with tackling climate change. Governments at COP28 must commit to transforming food systems through progress on the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on agriculture. Alongside that, the UK Government must develop a cross-departmental strategy on providing support for more resilient food systems internationally that prioritises the needs of small-scale farmers. Small-scale farmers are really the climate activists on the frontline of climate change; they will be the best advocates, and will take the best actions on climate change, but they need funding and support to do so.

The fifth concern is the need to invest in climate-resilient water sanitation and hygiene projects, and the need for policies that enable people to respond to immediate threats and to adapt to the impacts of climate change where they are. People do not want to leave where they live because of climate change. They absolutely want to stay where they are, but with water for agriculture, to grow crops and to live in hygienic conditions.

The climate crisis is also a crisis of health around the world. As we saw with covid, we need to be able to wash our hands. That is such a basic need. Healthcare centres need adequate water and sanitation. The climate crisis threatens advances in sanitation, which threatens advances in poverty reduction. We must also ensure we keep clean water, wherever it is found.

Labour will take further, faster action on the environment. Labour knows that this is an exciting opportunity for economic growth, for a new industry, and for job creation. We will insulate 19 million homes within a decade under our warm homes plan, which will cut bills by up to £500 and create 4 million jobs. We will act fast to lead the world as a clean and cheap energy superpower by 2030. We will establish GB Energy, a new home-grown publicly owned champion of clean energy generation, so that we can be really world-leading in the action that we take at home. We will deliver thousands of high-quality jobs to every corner of this great country.

Labour believes that we need a just transition to a net zero economy. That cannot be left to the whims of the market, as was the de-industrialisation of the 1980s. Social justice must be at the centre of our response to the climate and environment emergency, and fairness must shape our approach to the green transition here at home. We have to actively shape that green transition, so that no one is left behind and people and places are protected throughout. Ecological breakdown is also a major problem; the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries on earth. Labour will ensure that we not only halt but reverse the loss of biodiversity in the UK by 2030.

In conclusion, I look forward to attending COP28 this year. I went to many international conferences in my previous work before I was an MP. I always go with high hopes, and always leave with a high degree of disappointment, feeling that we could have gone further. I could almost write the conference press releases before I go, but I maintain a high degree of hope and optimism, as more and more people work together internationally to take on the crisis. All around the world, the green sprint has now begun; there is a surge in renewables, green technology and economic growth. We are making, at pace, some of the technological advances that are needed if we are to achieve the necessary outcomes for our climate, and they are becoming affordable. I hope we can come together to stave off the worst of the impacts to climate and nature, and together create a better and more prosperous world.

1.34 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson). She may be disappointed by what she hears from others, but she never disappoints with what she says in this House. We were in Pakistan back in February. We have an interest in issues relating to persecution and freedom of religious belief, and in how we can help through work on human rights. She is experienced and knowledgeable on the subject of water, and we visited some encouraging projects, but we were reminded of the impact in parts of the world where, unlike here, water is a scarce commodity.

I am very happy to speak in the debate, and I cannot believe it is again time for the annual COP meeting. This year it is in Dubai, where I am sure the weather will be much better than in the UK, given the storms we had

[*Jim Shannon*]

recently. This year's cross-cutting themes aim to address our main targets: technology, inclusion, finance and front-line communities.

It is great that we have the opportunity to discuss these issues. It is always a pleasure to provide a Northern Ireland perspective in debates in this Chamber and elsewhere, so that we have a united and joint approach to our climate change and net zero targets. It is also a pleasure to see the Minister in his place. I was encouraged by some of the things he referred to, such as the targets met and the goals achieved. I believe in giving credit to those who do well. At the same time, if targets are not met, then we challenge. Let us put on record our thanks where goals have been achieved. It was also a pleasure to hear from the Labour shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), and the SNP shadow, the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock). They made valuable contributions, as others have.

I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union, because I will speak about agriculture. Across the world, we have fires, floods, droughts and tsunamis. Those things do not just happen; man and woman have a role to play in the world in which we all live. Nature, I would suggest, is angry. It is nature's way of reminding us that what we do has repercussions.

To go back to Northern Ireland, it is no secret how crucial our agriculture sector is. I live on a farm. All my neighbours are farmers and most of them are dairy men. Farming is the largest emitting sector in Northern Ireland, contributing some 27% of emissions—and that increased over the 30 years covered by the statistical bulletin to which I refer. The Government, the Ulster Farmers' Union and the National Farmers Union have committed to reducing those emissions, and it is important that that happens. It is no secret how challenging it is to cut emissions. Large organisations such as the Ulster Farmers' Union and the NFU have had to cope and adapt in a short space of time, so it is promising to see that COP will address that this year. It is important that that happens.

On 10 December, the theme for the day will be food and agriculture. The aim will be to address innovation investment, regenerative agriculture and national transformation. That is a positive sign that our agricultural industries are being given the means of contributing to climate targets. At the Democratic Unionist party conference about a month ago, the UFU had a stand, and it has a paper on how to achieve net zero targets. Be under no illusion: farmers, landowners, my neighbours and the unions are totally committed to doing their bit to achieve climate targets. There is definitely a clear, central role for farmers.

Many comparisons can be made between the state of our climate and prevailing health issues across the UK and further afield. As my party's health spokesperson, I am greatly pleased that health issues will also be addressed at COP. It looks like a terrific conference, and there are lots of key issues on the agenda that I would like discussed.

I have been in contact with organisations about the clean air programme, which is tackling the air quality issues facing us all. For the first time at a COP summit, a full day's agenda has been devoted this year to initiatives designed to

“protect livelihoods and support community resilience and stability”

in the face of the advancing effects of climate change. While some may say that there is no such thing as climate change, the facts—the evidence that we all have in front of us—tell us that there is, and that something must be done about it. There will be high-level discussions about the importance of clean air, which has been proven to lead to improvements in both mental and physical health.

Some three weeks ago, I spoke in a debate about circular economies and their importance in our local communities. Ards and North Down Council, which covers the area in which I both work and reside, has a proven commitment to acting sustainably to create a vibrant and healthy economy. Recognising the contribution that local councils and devolved Administrations can make to net zero targets across the UK is perhaps the smallest but most important step to take in regulating environmental sustainability. The Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly all have a key role to play. We all play that role in our own places, but when we all come together, it is the teamwork that delivers. Whether we discuss these issues at events as large as COP or more internally back home in local council chambers, we will never progress without having the conversations. It is great, and commendable, that efforts in that regard are being made at all levels of government.

I look forward sincerely to hearing the comments made at COP28, and not only from the perspective of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Again, it is no secret that I love this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I believe that it is better together. Some may have a different opinion—at least one Member who is in the Chamber now, perhaps—but the rest of us are committed to the importance of that. When it comes to looking further afield and globally, the United Kingdom of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland, as well as all the regions, has a part to play—at all political levels: council, regional, and Westminster. COP provides an opportunity for a joint and united approach to meeting our targets, and that is something that we have to achieve. There are no “ifs” about it; there are no questions. We must ensure that efforts are made in this place to achieve those goals.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Minister to wind up the debate.

1.42 pm

Graham Stuart: I congratulate all the Members who have spoken in the debate, which is an important one ahead of COP28. Further to the other interactions that I mentioned in my opening speech, we will be making a written ministerial statement on our priorities for COP before we go, and I will be responsible for the negotiations there.

It has been a very interesting debate, but it is a shame that the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) struggled so much to acknowledge the position that we are in. I have never heard it come out of her mouth that this country has cut its emissions more than any other major economy on this earth, which it has, or that it has the most ambitious plans of any economy on this earth, which it has. It would be good to have that as a baseline; there is plenty of room to pick up on issues and concerns about our performance while also acknowledging that

the UK truly is a global leader. I am pleased to say we are not only leading domestically, but leading in the international space as well.

A couple of Members mentioned the Climate Change Committee in the context of the Prime Minister's speech in September. It is worth noting that the Climate Change Committee's analysis shows that there is "no material difference" in our progress in cutting emissions since its last report in June. We are tacking, as I would put it. However, our destination remains exactly the same. We are reassuring people in rural areas who were fearful that they could neither afford heat pumps nor be sure of their functionality, while increasing the subsidy for them by 50%, and working to build the system and drive the cost curve down, so that more and more homes can have them. That is right the way to ensure that we maintain public support for delivering net zero.

The same applies to zero-emission vehicles. Manufacturers have a ZEV mandate—an obligation to "green" their fleet up to 2030. That builds on our successful record to date; we are ahead of the Climate Change Committee's and our own projections. We are maintaining that ZEV mandate. The Climate Change Committee spoke of "no material difference" in progress on particular changes, but the focus on grid and other aspects of the Prime Minister's speech are all about turbocharging our efforts to deliver not only the nationally determined contribution in 2030, but net zero by 2050.

Methane was mentioned, and it is an important issue. The global methane pledge is a collective commitment intended to mobilise international action on methane. I am pleased to say that UK methane emissions between 1990 and 2021 dropped by 62%, one of the largest reductions in any OECD country, but I should also to highlight the fact that methane represents one of our biggest opportunities—the opportunity to ensure that that pledge is delivered not only domestically but internationally. It should also be noted that we are the only major economy to set a legally binding emissions reduction target, of 77%, for 2035 as part of carbon budget 6. We will see what happens at the 2025 COP in Brazil—10 years on from Paris—but the expectation is that new NDCs will come forward for 2035.

Finance was touched on in the debate. We remain one of the largest and most active donors in international climate finance, and we are making record commitments. With the aim of helping the world to adapt to the inevitable climate change impacts that we can already see, at COP27 the Prime Minister made a commitment to triple UK adaptation finance from £500 million in 2019 to £1.5 billion in 2025. The UK is also committed to maintaining a balance between mitigation and adaptation spending, and to providing at least £3 billion of UK climate finance for the purpose of protecting and restoring nature. We provide the majority of our climate finance in the form of much-needed grants rather than loans—which I think compares well with what is provided by some other donor countries—and we prioritise our contributions for the biggest challenges faced by the poorest and most vulnerable.

Alongside Malawi and Vanuatu, I co-chaired the climate and development ministerial ahead of the Abu Dhabi pre-COP meetings. It focused on the issue of access, which was absolutely right. We hear again and again from countries such as Samoa, whose Minister has said that the access process takes too long. At the

CDM, we set out a "vision statement" expressing greater recognition of the need for national programme development to ease access to money as well as increasing the quantum. The hon. Lady is right: it is not enough to have this notional money if it does not actually flow to those who by definition, as she said, are the least able administratively to meet the requirements of some vast organisation. We need to make sure that the system fits the needs of those it serves, rather than the other way round.

Kerry McCarthy: I welcome what the Minister has said. I think that another problem for those countries is coming up with the evidence base to demonstrate the impact that climate change is having on them. There are currently some very good initiatives: for example, science students from the UK are going out to study marine areas. There is a great deal of interchange. Does the Minister think we could do more to facilitate that evidence-gathering, which could then be used as a basis for making an application to show the need for climate adaptation funding?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We need to make sure that technical assistance is there because, even as we try to get the green climate fund, the global environment facility, the World Bank and various others to improve their systems and ambitions to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable—shouting at both parties is like shoving a nine-pin plug and a three-pin plug together and wrapping them in gaffer tape—we also need to get a smoother system that helps them both to step up so that it genuinely flows, otherwise we will have endless frustration. Hearing Ministers from Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Samoa and elsewhere brings it alive, which is why these international meetings are useful. They remind us of the realities on the ground.

Since 2011, The UK's climate finance has supported more than 100 million people to cope with the effects of climate change, improved the climate resilience of more than 32 million people and reduced or avoided more than 86 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Nature has rightly been mentioned, and we want to see action and ambition from the presidency and all parties on transforming food systems and building policy, practice and investment for sustainable agriculture at scale. That includes endorsement of the leaders' declaration on food, agriculture and climate action, supported by a further commitment to policy action, innovation and investment through the policy dialogue for sustainable agriculture and the agriculture breakthrough.

It is always difficult to keep our head around all these issues, as there is an alphabet soup of initiatives. I always want to check that they are not duplicative, but they are often complementary and working together.

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): The Minister is making a very strong case for the disparate issues that the Government are pressing on climate change. If we are to reach net zero by 2050, there will also need to be a massive increase in the supply of critical minerals, whether for EV batteries or solar panels. When he is going around all these initiatives at international level, what discussions is he having with the likes of Brazil, Indonesia and other lynchpin partners about joining the Minerals Security Partnership? That is the primary multilateral vehicle for addressing critical minerals.

Graham Stuart: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, which comes up frequently. When I was in Riyadh recently, I spoke about critical minerals with His Royal Highness, Prince Abdulaziz, the Energy Minister of Saudi Arabia, which is critical in this piece.

Whereas my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) went on to the mangroves, I went on to Indonesia by way of Vietnam, and these conversations came up all the time. My right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) is right that making sure we have resilient supply chains is fundamental to delivering this. We are doing more on supply chains, and we are doing it faster than ever before—even faster than the industrial revolution—and it is not only happening here. It is happening in other countries at the same time, as it needs to, so we have to make sure that our supply chains can meet that action. We can best do that through collaboration. It is not just about reaching agreement on things such as critical minerals; it takes many years to develop projects and bring them through to production, which creates even more urgency.

To promote improved and responsible governance, we are also looking for a commitment to support the forest and climate leaders partnership at the world climate action summit at the beginning of COP. We also want to see partnership on water resources at all levels. Donor countries and the private sector need to be involved, too.

Fleur Anderson: I thank the Minister for mentioning water. He is talking about the many issues he will cover when he goes to the various meetings, so does he agree that water, sanitation and hygiene are important issues to raise? Will he look out for them in the outcome documents, press releases and statements that come out after the conference?

Graham Stuart: I enjoyed the hon. Lady's speech. Unsurprisingly, when I was in the middle east recently, water was right at the top of the agenda, reflecting its importance. I attended the Net Zero Council meeting in Manchester last Thursday, and it was my pleasure on the following day to go to the Severn Trent water treatment works in Stoke. By the end of next year, it is expected to be the world's first carbon-neutral water treatment works, for which I pay tribute to Severn Trent. Again, it shows the importance of water, which is so often forgotten. Water is one of the workstreams of the Net Zero Council, which was established this year to bring together the Government and business to develop road maps for each sector of our economy.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal for her driven, heartfelt efforts to make sure that nature's contribution to the climate is fully recognised. The reason for holding the climate and development ministerial is that climate and development are two sides of the same coin. If there could be a three-sided coin—I am stretching my metaphors—the third side would be nature, because climate, development and nature go together.

We have talked about the importance of forests, and we have to make sure that the people who live in and around these carbon sinks—they are not just carbon sinks; they have many other qualities—have economic incentives that align with what we want. We have to make sure that they see development and opportunity for their families. It is only on that basis that we can

even ask them to protect the nature that has been so denuded here. If we are to ask others to protect their nature for the general benefit, we need to make sure that it fits with development, as well as contributing to climate and nature.

I thank my right hon. Friend for Suffolk Coastal for all she has done. Her enthusiasm for mangroves is clearly shared across the House. They are a bit of a miracle. Making a difference often costs a lot of money, so we have to try to align incentives as much as possible. We need projects in which very small amounts of funding can make all the difference, so that mangroves stop shrinking and start expanding, and so that people return from the city to work with their families around the mangroves as part of a prosperous community. The mangroves need to be prosperous while developing as a carbon sink.

Deidre Brock: It was very interesting to hear about the importance of mangroves. I would also be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about peatlands. How will he be supporting them at COP?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The Congo has extraordinarily large and important peatlands, which have the same basic dynamics. Everything is different, and every country is different, which is why we have to pull different things together, but the fundamental principle is that we have to create a system in which the local people—from the governor of the province down to the indigenous villagers—are better off by maintaining and keeping these peatlands. We are keen to make sure that the role of peatlands is understood because, again, they are a critical enabler. Lost peatlands cannot easily be replaced, and they are part of the negative tipping point we could reach if we do not take urgent action.

Kerry McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's enthusiasm and recognition that peatlands have an important role to play but, at the moment, they are emitting carbon because of how they are treated in this country, particularly when it comes to grouse moor management. Does he agree that we need to address those practices? Many peatlands are also sites of special scientific interest or are meant to be protected for nature in other ways.

Graham Stuart: I will not stumble into another Department's area of responsibility. We work collectively across Government to share the burden of making sure we meet our net zero targets.

In wrapping up the debate, I assure hon. and right hon. Members of the Government's commitment to delivering on net zero at home and internationally. Although there is evidence that a peak in global emissions is within sight this decade, we need emissions to peak by 2025 and to reduce by 43% by 2030. The sobering reality is that, this year, global emissions are likely to reach a new peak, as Members across the House have said. Keeping 1.5° within reach requires nothing less than a paradigm shift.

As I said in my opening remarks, the UK accounts for less than 1% of global emissions. Beyond what is directly within our grasp, the question before us is how we can help to create the will and the capability to move the remaining 99%, for which the major emitters, in particular, will be crucial.

I would like to close by offering some reflections on the UK's role in helping to drive forward international progress in this critical decade. For hon. Members who are interested, we have set out in greater detail the UK's vision and role in driving forward international action on climate and nature to 2030 in our 2030 strategic framework, which is available online. It sets out six key global challenges, and how we will use our international partnerships, strengths in finance, expertise and domestic leadership, trade and investment, and world-leading strengths in science and innovation to drive forward progress.

The first point to make is that though the gap looks unassailably large, we must not lose hope and fall into a council of doom. The reality is that efforts to date have succeeded in bending the emissions curve away from apocalyptic levels of warming of 3° or more. In some sectors, notably energy and electric cars, the transition is taking off. The IEA's latest world energy outlook predicts a peak in fossil fuel use by 2025, due to what it describes as the "unstoppable" growth of low-carbon technologies. Solar and electric vehicles particularly stand out. Since only last year, the IEA has revised up its global solar 2050 capacity forecast by 69% and increased by 20% the number of electric vehicles it expects to be on the roads by 2030, such that it is expecting electric vehicles to comprise two thirds of new car sales by 2030.

The lesson we should draw here is clear: rapid, large-scale transformation is possible. The challenge is that we need to replicate this success across all sectors of the economy. There will be no single silver bullet to driving the transformational systemic change that we need on a global scale. We will deploy every important lever we have to accelerate action in this critical decade, building on the framework we put forward in the Glasgow pact and our 2030 strategic framework. That includes working through the United Nations framework convention on climate change, bilaterally and through other channels. Working with others who are like-minded, and others, we need to see countries upgrading their climate targets. There is no point in having a global stocktake eight years after the Paris agreement if it does not lead to a ratcheting up of the nationally determined contributions to match the requirements that we find from the science. In particular, we need the major emitters to do that. Countries representing more than 90% of global GDP are covered, as I have said, by some form of net zero target. Those countries now need to align their near-term targets with the commitments that they have made. We will harness our global diplomatic network, international development offer and partnerships to drive forward action.

We will also be taking action to realign financial flows in line with the Paris agreement and a nature-positive future. We will use our strengths as a global green finance centre and role as a shareholder of key financial institutions to reorientate finance flows and tap the

power of markets to make progress towards unlocking the trillions required. We will accelerate transitions globally through targeted collaboration with others, focusing on the most important, highest-emitting sectors, through initiatives such as the breakthrough agenda, so that we can reach positive tipping points and avoid negative ones, and so that clean tech is affordable and accessible across all sectors of the global economy. We will also continue to push to accelerate the global energy transition, for example, through our long-standing leadership on phasing out coal in the Powering Past Coal Alliance. We will also champion the need to phase out unabated fossil fuels and at the same time transition the North sea into a clean energy powerhouse here at home.

Let me touch on that issue, as it was raised by others. We have new licences in the North sea for oil and gas because we continue to need oil and gas. We will need oil and gas in 2050 and beyond. Our production is falling, without new licences, at a rate of about 9%. With no new licences and no new investment, we will not see a greening of the basin. Worse, we will see the loss of the subsea and offshore engineering capability we need, as it will either leave this country or be made redundant, rather than being retained here.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) raised the issue of a just transition. There is a true transition to be made, and opposing new oil and gas licences in this country when we are a net importer of both, and when the emissions that will come from imports such as liquefied natural gas would be higher, makes the Opposition parties friends of oil and gas workers, but just not those in this country. The approach of those parties will not make any difference to how much we consume, but it will make a difference to our emissions, and not in a good way, and it will lose the very engineering capability we need to deliver the transition, as well as a very material contribution to our ability to make that change, which is of course the £50 billion of taxes that we expect to get from the sector over the next five years. The Opposition parties are in entirely the wrong place. They have put optics ahead of doing the right thing, and it does not take a lot of reflection or analysis to come to the conclusion that we are doing the right thing.

We must globally focus on the positive tipping points we need to accelerate the global low-carbon transition. I thank hon. Members from across the House for their contributions to this debate, and I hope that my team and I will be able to count on the support of everyone in the House, despite all of the global challenges we face, to make the upcoming COP the success that the world needs it to be.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered COP28.

Court Transcript Costs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Robert Langan.)

2.5 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I am grateful to Mr Speaker for granting my request for a debate on the cost of court transcripts. Justice should not have a price tag, as I think we would all agree. Yet many victims are being denied access to justice because they cannot afford to pay thousands of pounds to obtain court transcripts. Not only are these extortionate costs unaffordable, but they are a major barrier to victims' recovery.

This issue was first brought to my attention in August when my constituent, Juliana Terlizzi, approached my office for assistance in obtaining a court transcript. In 2020, Juliana was drugged and then raped in her sleep by her former partner. She was then forced to wait two years for her case to be heard in court. Backlogs and chaos in the court system pushed back the date time and time again. Meanwhile, her attacker was free to walk the streets and use dating apps to search for other women.

In January 2022, Juliana's attacker was finally convicted, but she can barely remember what was said in the courtroom due to trauma and emotional distress. Following the trial, she was advised by a therapist to apply for a transcript of the proceedings to aid her healing; this transcript would enable her to revisit and process what was said in court. She made an application to the court for a free copy of the transcript, but her application was rejected. She was told to contact one of the private companies outsourced by the Government to supply transcripts. Upon doing so, she was quoted a fee of an astonishing £7,500. This was £7,500 to read what happened in a trial in which Juliana herself was the victim—£7,500 to revisit what was said while her trauma was discussed by strangers in a courtroom. That cost simply does not stack up. How can it be so high and why must Juliana foot the bill?

My team and I began to research this issue some more, and I soon discovered that Juliana's extortionate quote was not an isolated case, with some victims facing fees of up to £22,000. How can anyone be expected to pay such a fee? Court transcripts should not be a luxury that only those very few victims with thousands to spare can afford. Transcripts are so important, because they are often the only means available to victims to establish exactly what happened during a trial. Victims and bereaved families routinely do not attend trial. Some choose not to attend in order to avoid reliving their trauma. One victim told me that she would have been forced to sit with her abuser's friends and family in the gallery if she were present at the sentencing hearing. Others are misadvised by the police and court staff on their right to attend trial. Shockingly, some victims are actively discouraged from attending and told that their presence would be a distraction to the jury.

Although the technology exists, victims are often not offered a video link to watch the trial remotely. There is a major lack of transparency of justice and a lack of information provided to victims. Most victims will find out the verdict only by a phone call. If the outcome is not favourable, what then? How can a victim even begin to come to terms with the verdict when they have no means of understanding how it was reached? Even for

victims such as Juliana who are able to attend trial, a combination of trauma and legal jargon means that it is extremely difficult to recall what was said. Transcripts are therefore a vital source of information for victims and bereaved families. Transcripts can support their understanding and allow them to take steps towards recovery.

The UK justice system is failing victims, who feel like bystanders to justice. They have no contact with the prosecution, no insight into proceedings and very limited information on their rights as a victim. Victims have told me that their experience in the UK justice system was retraumatising—one even described it as more traumatising than the crime committed against her. Our justice system must work to support victims and to encourage them to come forward. Without victims bravely reporting crime, there can be no justice.

Yet there are currently many disincentives to reporting a crime. Our courts are still plagued by backlogs and delays. Victims face average delays of 679 days between a crime being committed and cases concluding at court. Justice delayed is justice denied, and it allows criminals to continue to walk the streets for far too long.

The Conservative Government's failure to get to grips with the backlog is letting down victims and their families, witnesses and defendants, and it undermines public confidence in the justice system. Even when crimes are reported, in many cases the outcome is not favourable. According to Rape Crisis, just 2% of rapes recorded by police between July 2022 and June 2023 resulted in someone being charged that same year, let alone convicted. For those victims who finally see their case brought to court, once the verdict is reached, they are tossed aside. Things have to change.

The Victims' Commissioner for London has been working tirelessly to shine a light on the experiences of victims in the UK justice system. I met the commissioner to discuss the urgent reforms needed to better support victims, and I am proud to support her campaign for greater transparency in our justice system.

The Justice Committee looked into the issue of court transcript costs. In three separate reports over the last 18 months, the Committee recommended that the Government take steps to improve access to court transcripts and reduce costs. The Scottish Criminal Justice Committee also completed an inquiry into transcription fees, and a successful campaign led by rape survivors secured a commitment from the Scottish Government to set up a pilot scheme to waive court transcript fees for victims of sexual violence. Yet Ministers in Westminster continue to sit on their hands and allow private companies to pass extortionate costs on to victims.

The Victims and Prisoners Bill presents the perfect opportunity to address this gross injustice. Today, I published an open letter to the Justice Secretary calling on the Government to make provisions within that Bill to enable victims and bereaved families to request a court transcript free of charge. I am delighted to be supported by 40 co-signatories, including Members from six different parties across the House, among them the Mother and the Father of the House and the Chair of the Justice Committee. I am also joined by the Victims' Commissioner for London and senior figures from the charities Refuge, Rape Crisis, Women's Aid and Support after Murder and Manslaughter. We stand united in supporting victims and their right to access justice.

The Government often pay lip service to the importance of transparency and accessibility of justice. In response to a written question I tabled in September, the Minister wrote:

“Accessing transcripts from proceedings in serious criminal cases is not only a fundamental right of victims but is also essential for maintaining transparency and accountability within the justice system”

I welcome that statement from the Minister and I wholeheartedly agree with his position, so why are the Government refusing to take steps to ensure victims are able to access timely and accurate transcripts free of charge?

The Minister will point to the mechanisms already in place to enable some victims and their families to obtain transcripts, such as permitting sentencing remarks to be made available at the judge’s discretion or measures to provide families bereaved by homicide with sentencing remarks. But that is not enough. Countless victims are still unable to afford a transcript and, as proved in cases such as Juliana’s, more often than not, victims will be told by the judge that their case does not meet the very narrow criteria for a free transcript.

The Government have said that providing transcripts to victims free of charge would result in significant cost, but that is not necessarily the case. There are steps the Government could and should be taking to reduce costs. In a report on open justice, published last year, the Justice Committee recommended that His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service should explore whether greater use of technology, such as AI-powered transcription, could reduce the cost of producing court transcripts. Will the Minister provide an update on whether that recommendation has been acted on?

Additionally, will the Government look to assess the value for money of contracts it holds with private transcription services? Are victims really getting the best possible deal? Is £7,500 a fair price to pay? I wrote to the Minister on 15 September to set out proposals to provide an audio recording to victims upon request. It should be possible to provide that at low or no cost, as recordings are already made of Crown court proceedings. Two days ago, I received a response from the Minister that said his officials would give the matter careful consideration. I look forward to hearing more when some progress has been made.

The Government cannot ignore victims any longer. Victims and bereaved families need access to full, accurate transcripts of court proceedings. Anything less will be an injustice. I have tabled an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill that will enable victims to request a transcript of court proceedings free of charge. I urge the Government to accept the amendment in order to finally show victims that they matter, that they did the right thing in coming forward and that the UK justice system will support them, during the trial and afterwards. Ahead of the Bill’s Report stage, will the Minister meet me to discuss my amendment and the experience of my constituent? His engagement on this issue is vital if the Bill is to succeed in delivering a positive outcome for victims.

I thank the victims, advocates and charities that have taken the time to share their experiences and insight with me. Without their tireless campaigning, change could never occur. I now hope the Government will honour their work and commit to improving transparency and accessibility of justice for victims. For that, victims need access to full transcripts, free of charge.

2.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) on securing this important debate.

The principle that justice must be open and transparent goes to the very heart of our justice system. Upholding this principle is paramount to securing the trust and confidence of victims, whose experiences are central to the way our society thinks about and responds to crime—we are as like minds on that. I am sorry to hear about the experience of the hon. Lady’s constituent, Ms Juliana Terlizzi, as she sought to obtain a trial transcript as the victim of a horrific crime.

I recognise that there may be many reasons why victims may find a court transcript helpful in the aftermath of lengthy and sometimes complex criminal court proceedings. In cases where victims do not attend the trial, they may seek to understand the verdict and how it was reached. Even in cases where a victim attends the trial, myriad factors may exacerbate the difficulties they experience in following court proceedings, including having to face the defendant and the defendant’s family, which can be particularly difficult for victims whose first language is not English.

The ability to access transcripts from court proceedings is an essential part of maintaining transparency and accountability within the system. That is why we have provided the required technology to the Crown courts to enable transcription of different parts of the hearing from the recordings made in all proceedings. Understandably, a cost is attached to transcribing what could be weeks’ worth of audio, which will vary depending on the length of the trial. Transcription companies calculate the costs on a case-by-case basis depending on a variety of factors, such as the size of the transcript, whether it is a copy or a new version being requested, and how quickly the transcript is required.

Preparing a court transcript is currently a manual process whereby transcription companies listen to audio files to transcribe the hearings. Although AI technology is available, the most recent pilots to test voice-to-text technology do not demonstrate sufficient accuracy—an element that is crucial where criminal trial records are concerned. Taken together, producing a full trial transcript, depending on its size, can cost in the region of thousands of pounds, as the hon. Lady pointed out.

I appreciate the concerns around the charges quoted for trial transcripts. However, the call to provide transcripts free of charge to victims in all cases involves significant financial implications to the taxpayer, which requires careful analysis. It is also important to recognise that subsidising the cost of full trial transcripts using public funds risks diverting those resources away from other avenues to improve victims’ services and outcomes.

The Ministry of Justice has been working to make court records, such as transcripts, judgments and judicial sentencing remarks, increasingly accessible, including through more of them being published online. I reassure the hon. Lady that we are carefully considering the issues that she raises as part of that work. We are committed to ensuring that victims are supported at every juncture of the criminal justice system. That is why we introduced the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which continues its passage through Parliament. The Bill will

[Mike Freer]

enshrine in primary legislation the overarching principles that must be reflected in the victims code, including entitlements for victims to be provided with information about the criminal justice process, as well as access to support services. That package builds on concrete measures that are already making a real difference, including our commitment to the end-to-end rape review, which has already seen us return adult rape cases reaching court to 2016 levels, well ahead of schedule.

I gently point out that it is not true that the Government have abandoned victims. The Government have introduced measures that allow complainants to pre-record their evidence, saving them from having to face their attacker. We stood up a 24/7 rape support line. Victims have the right to court familiarisation visits, to seek a redetermination in the event that the Crown Prosecution Service decides to reduce the charge, and to make a victim personal statement. We will quadruple victim funding by 2024-25, up from £41 million in 2009-10, and we have rolled out more than 800 independent sexual violence advisers.

We have rolled out enhanced support at three Crown courts, in Newcastle, Leeds and Snaresbrook, through the specialist sexual violence support project. We have upgraded technology and facilities, and will continue with trauma-informed training for staff, a case co-ordinator to improve case progress, and giving victims more opportunities to observe sentencing hearings remotely. There is obviously more to be done, but I gently put it on the record that the idea that victims of sexual crime are being abandoned is simply not true.

Sarah Olney: I do not think that I ever accused the Government of having abandoned victims, so it is slightly odd that the Minister is rebutting that. However, will he expand slightly on whether victims could be provided directly with oral recordings, instead of having to pay for expensive transcripts that have been created from them?

Mike Freer: My understanding is that at present it is possible for victims to visit the court by arrangement to listen to a full audio transcript of the trial, and that the sentencing remarks can be particularly helpful to victims in understanding how the judgment was arrived at. Access to those is a piece of work that we are working on at pace. I accept the point about audio, and I am more than happy to take away whether they can be provided, as a step further than the victim's having to attend court. That is a fair challenge, which I will happily take away.

The hon. Lady commented on the various reports by the Justice Committee. She will also know that the Department recently conducted a call for evidence on the matter of open justice and asked the public which court records should be published online and made

available on request. That exercise is fundamental to ensuring that we continue to uphold the principles of openness and transparency, while looking at ways to modernise the courts to meet people's expectations. The call for evidence closed in September, and we are currently evaluating the information provided. We will report back on our response early next year.

Alongside the Victims and Prisoners Bill and the call for evidence, I assure the hon. Lady that the Ministry of Justice is working with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to identify further opportunities to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. That includes examining, among other matters, the costs that they incur when obtaining court transcripts. I recognise that she has tabled an amendment to the Bill. She will be able to expand on her arguments, and take the matter up directly with the relevant Bill Minister, when we come to that specific part of the Bill.

I reiterate that victims can apply to the court for permission to listen to the audio recording to hear it at a suitable location, free of charge. It is at judicial discretion, but that is an opportunity for victims to hear the trial. To help with court transcription costs, we have made sure that bereaved family members of victims of homicide and of death by dangerous driving can get a copy of the judicial sentencing remarks—a specific part of the sentencing hearings—paid for by the public purse. In certain serious criminal cases, a copy of the sentencing remarks can be made available, but I do accept that the hon. Lady would like us to go further. As I have said, the call for evidence on openness is being evaluated and I will ensure that her views are taken into account as part of that work.

To conclude, in line with the key principles of open and transparent justice, I recognise how important it is for victims to be able to access the transcript of criminal proceedings. There are existing policies that operate to achieve transparency for victims within the criminal justice system, but I recognise that there remain concerns about the transcription charges. I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Lady that the Government are committed to improving the experience and support that victims receive.

The Ministry of Justice will continue to progress the Victims and Prisoners Bill to put victims' interests firmly at the heart of the justice system. We will also analyse and use the responses that we have received in the recent call for evidence on the matter of open justice and court records to better inform future policy. Finally, we will continue to identify opportunities to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system, which includes examining the charges that they incur when obtaining court transcripts.

Question put and agreed to.

2.26 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 16 November 2023

[DAME ANGELA EAGLE *in the Chair*]

Floating Offshore Wind

[*Relevant documents: Second Report of the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 2022-23, Floating Offshore Wind in Wales, HC1182, and the Government response, HC1405.*]

1.30 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered floating offshore wind.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela. I will start by welcoming the work of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and, in particular, that of my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State in developing floating offshore wind—which I will refer to as FLOW for the rest of the debate—right here in the UK.

FLOW represents a huge opportunity for the UK as a whole, but especially for coastal communities such as my own in North Devon. I particularly thank the new Secretary of State for her engagement following the results of the contracts for difference allocation round 5. Indeed, in her own maiden speech, she celebrated the role of her constituency in pioneering renewable energy and celebrated our being a world leader in offshore wind.

Yesterday's announcement that the Government have halved inflation since the start of the year was very welcome, as is the reduction of energy bills. As we all know, the price jump was caused by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, but it demonstrated just why we need to accelerate the development of sustainable British energy generation. We live on a very windy, very tidal and sometimes even sunny island, and my North Devon constituency is particularly blessed with all three. If we can increase the amount of energy that we generate from these renewable sources, British households will be better insulated from global energy price shocks and able to rely on secure, clean energy.

We have already seen the potential that onshore wind and fixed offshore wind has, and it is fantastic to see it generating more and more of our energy mix. FLOW can potentially take that even further. A common criticism of our continued development of wind turbines is that they only work when the wind blows the right way. Traditionally, our offshore wind farms are situated off our north-east coastline, where the waters are shallower and the current is less temperamental—conditions that work for fixed offshore wind. In the Celtic sea, the wind blows the other way around, but the Atlantic Array was unable to go ahead because of the deeper waters and the strong currents coming in off the Atlantic. FLOW will open up areas such as the Celtic sea, so that we can generate energy no matter which way the wind blows. As it can be deployed in waters deeper than 60 metres, this technology opens up 80% of our offshore wind resource.

FLOW is set to make up to 5 GW of our energy generation by 2030, and 50 GW by 2050. It has the potential to bring in 29,000 jobs and £43.5 billion in

gross value added to the UK by 2050, but we must ensure that we are ahead of the curve by not just deploying this technology for energy generation but harnessing its full potential by developing the manufacturing element as well.

The lack of bids in AR5 was incredibly disappointing for developers across the industry. Missing out on a year of development has increased uncertainty in the market at a time when both the EU and United States are offering more support to develop FLOW. It also put at risk £20 billion of short-term investment into the UK, which will be crucial for developing not just FLOW itself but the associated manufacturing and supply chain.

We are currently a global leader. Of the 200 MW of FLOW deployed worldwide, 70 MW can be found here in the UK. However, to maintain our position, we must provide developers with certainty and get this technology off the ground and out to sea. There is concern about FLOW being treated the same as fixed offshore wind in AR5. When fixed offshore wind was at a similar point in its development, it had access to final investment decision enabling for renewables and renewables obligations certificates. FIDER and ROC both provided revenue and business-case certainty, reduced competition and created the conditions for much-needed investment, and we are now reaping those benefits. Fixed-bottom wind farms were able to trial different cutting-edge technologies and take higher risks, where they could accurately model best-case and worst-case scenarios.

FLOW is currently in a similar situation. Pre-commercial projects in the UK need to be able to trial different approaches. FLOW will reach price parity with fixed, but with this new complex technology, it cannot be all about price at this stage in its development journey. As one industry expert observed at our last meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for the Celtic sea:

“We have to stop obsessing about cost reduction for a technology that has not yet been deployed at scale, that if we support it to get it going like we did for fixed wind, costs will fall. Cost reduction occurs by deployment of technology, not the passing of time.”

The administrative strike price offered today for AR6, alongside the announcement that offshore wind will get its own pot, provides the Government with the potential to unlock a record level of investment in FLOW. To ensure we achieve that potential, I ask that the budget for offshore wind in AR6 is large enough that it is not consumed by one project, so that we can see as many eligible projects as possible get afloat.

That is counterbalanced by the need to ensure that the budget, to be announced next March, is not set so tightly that it forces violent competition during this fledgling stage of FLOW's development. Today's AR6 announcement is warmly welcomed by the industry and means we still have the opportunity to hit 5 GW by 2030, to safeguard those stepping-stone projects, and to cement our position as a global leader. It is also crucial to rebuilding confidence in the existing FLOW development pipeline. Now that we have the administrative strike price, I would welcome the bringing forward of AR6 for FLOW technology so that we can keep pressing to get FLOW afloat and minimise the delays caused by AR5.

Developing FLOW turbines and substructures is a considerable engineering endeavour, as substructures alone can be up to 80 metres across and weigh thousands of tonnes, with turbine heights expected to reach as high as 300 metres, as tall as the Shard. The manufacture

[Selaine Saxby]

and assembly of components will therefore need significant port requirements if the UK is to seize the first mover advantage. The £160 million floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme, known as FLOWMIS, which opened for bids this spring, is welcome, and the industry looks forward to seeing a fair share coming to key Celtic sea ports. However, funding decisions should be made on FLOWMIS as quickly as possible to allow our ports and supply chain to gear up for this huge opportunity, along with a strategic overview to ensure that ports work collaboratively to optimise supply chain expertise.

Developers also need certainty on leasing rounds to secure the sites they need to develop a full business case and make applications for future allocation round auctions. The recent update from the Crown Estate on the steps it is taking to increase transparency through the auction process was welcome. However, there remains uncertainty on the timelines for the leasing round, and it now appears leases will not be awarded until later in 2024. At this stage of technology development, it is essential that innovation projects start their journey now, if they are to succeed and help grow a flourishing UK supply chain. Initial opportunities need to be maximised to develop the capabilities to secure the economic benefits of the subsequent large-scale FLOW projects so that we can maximise exports to the growing global market in the future.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) chairs the Welsh Affairs Committee. He could not join us today, but he has done a huge amount of work to support FLOW and the projects potentially coming onshore in south Wales, where community engagement has ensured that they are now hopefully ready to bid straight into AR6 and proceed. The Committee recently released “Floating Offshore Wind in Wales”, which is a relevant document for this debate. I was glad to see its recommendation for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to work with the Crown Estate to provide visibility beyond the current leasing round and to bring out a strategy as to how it will be delivered.

Although I welcome the Government’s response to the report that the “Powering Up Britain” energy security plan already sets out the steps that they are taking, it would be good to see a more strategic lead on the development of FLOW, especially in the Celtic sea, where it is a brand-new technology. We need to look at the development of FLOW strategically, particularly in the Celtic sea and at a national level. We must work on the main prize, which is the gigawatt arrays and getting the demonstrators that are ready to proceed afloat.

Far too much time and energy is being spent in my constituency on the distraction of the seven turbines of White Cross. The time it takes to get these projects afloat means that early decisions are out of date by the time we get to crucial decisions. Indeed, the controversial White Cross project due to come ashore in my North Devon constituency may have only been able to secure a plug-in point at Yelland when it applied back in 2021, but National Grid seems to think now that it would be possible to connect at Alverdiscott, where the majority of the other projects coming into England will plug in. However, I suggest that this hugely unpopular project at

White Cross, which has now attracted more than 500 objections from across North Devon, including from our Biosphere, Natural England and an energy expert, will never get through planning. Community consultation and engagement are vital for such projects to succeed. This project is being bulldozed through my community, taking up vital local authority planning time when planning is the No. 1 reason that development of all types is delayed in North Devon.

In its objection to the development, Natural England said it still has fundamental concerns about the application as currently submitted. It also asks that the application is put on hold until further information and evidence are provided. I hope that someone can look more strategically at the Celtic sea, incorporate White Cross into the main projects and consider the whole Celtic sea project as one national infrastructure project, rather than subjecting small planning authorities to this amount of additional work. Indeed, we should learn from what happened down the east coast and secure one cable corridor in the Celtic sea, probably a split into Pembroke and Alverdiscott. We do not need one into Yelland as well. We should recognise that areas that rely on tourism are potentially less receptive to cables landing in beach car parks and to reduced income for multiple businesses in the area. I hope the Minister can bring whatever powers his Department has to bear to ensure that White Cross, if it goes ahead, delivers proper community benefits, fully recompenses the community for the inevitable damage to our core current industry, and shows more respect to the community of North Devon that I represent than its engagement programme has to date.

I set up the APPG for the Celtic sea to bring a strategic overview to the development of FLOW. That is not only about the process of getting the turbines afloat, which is obviously the priority, but looking further down the line to the supply chain, where cabling will land, the use of our marine areas, the environmental concerns, the operation and maintenance of the turbines once they are afloat, and how we service what should be an enormous industry in our region.

As has been seen with the proposed White Cross development in my constituency, many people who are otherwise supportive of the development of FLOW are concerned when it has an outsized and unnecessary impact on the local environment and businesses. It is crucial as we move forward that cabling routes are planned for the 250 turbines to minimise the disruption of blue carbon locked into the seabed, and we need to continue to focus on that long-term objective of getting the 250 turbines afloat.

Similarly, consideration needs to be taken for local industries, such as fishing, and of the effect that turbines will have on marine wildlife, such as seabirds. It is certainly not the case of supporting one of those things over the other, but by considering the development as a whole, we can minimise the impact the turbines and associated activities will have and can ensure that we develop clean green energy with community support.

As I have laid out, FLOW will be key to our secure and sustainable energy future. While I welcome today’s AR6 administrative strike price, I reiterate my ask that the AR6 for FLOW specifically—if at all possible—is brought forward. There is a concern that even the one-year delay may cause a far greater delay to these projects due to international supply chain pressures. We cannot

lose our first mover advantage and watch development of this exciting technology float overseas. I ask the Government to consider the Celtic sea development as a national infrastructure project so that we can consider it as a whole and bring the benefits to all our communities in the south-west and in Wales as swiftly as possible. Clear long-term plans are the best thing for the industry and the other industries that rely on our beautiful coastal areas.

1.44 pm

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on not only securing the debate, but all her work on raising the issue of offshore wind and floating offshore wind.

It was shocking and disappointing that the Government were not nimble and responsive enough with the industry to attract any bids for floating offshore wind in the last round, AR5, thus losing a year in the race to tackle climate change and to get ahead in the worldwide race to develop renewables. The Irish made the necessary adjustments, and they had a successful bid. I am not saying that we should always be in hock to manufacturers, but we need to listen to the people who will develop the renewable forms of energy, and co-operate, getting clear messages out so that they feel that the Government have a clear strategy and want manufacturers to be here, or they will be off somewhere else, as we saw clearly with Ireland on the border.

I will not dwell on that now; I would rather look to the future to see what needs to be done for us as the UK to get the most out of the development of floating offshore wind. We in the UK are well placed to grasp the opportunities and to reap the rewards that the development of floating offshore wind offers. Furthermore, it offers us a real opportunity to reinvigorate areas of the country where industry has declined in recent years, the very areas where we have deep ports and industrial base, and have for a long time been concerned about the decline of traditional industries. They are well suited to be leading the way on floating offshore wind.

In south-west Wales, for example, we have not only the potential in the Celtic sea, but the two ports, Milford Haven and Port Talbot, offering deep waters, plenty of space and a strong industrial base. Between them, we have my constituency of Llanelli, with its strong traditions of engineering firms and metal industries producing a huge range of components, from cables and bearings to complex equipment for the automotive and other sectors.

If the Government get this right, there is much potential for jobs in FLOW—the abbreviation the hon. Member for North Devon used for floating offshore wind—and the supply chain. Indeed, the floating offshore wind taskforce said that FLOW might support 30,000 jobs by the end of the decade. A report by Opergy in 2022 highlighted that with the right strategy, that could be as many as 67,000 by 2040. The report also noted that to get that jobs bonus, the Government will need to be proactive in addressing the skills gaps. To grasp the opportunities, we need a grim determination and a coherent industrial strategy from Government.

Here in the UK, we have this tremendous potential for floating offshore wind, as we are surrounded by sea, with plenty of strong winds. Floating offshore wind has the advantage of being able to be deployed further out, in deeper waters, where there are stronger and more

consistent winds, and where it is too deep for fixed turbines. Furthermore, away from these islands, 80% of the world's potential offshore wind energy is in fact in deeper waters. Therefore, the potential for export of FLOW technology and components is significant.

The fact that we have several demonstration projects operational, such as Kincardine and Hywind, also puts the UK in a good position to be a world leader. The UK can only grasp the full benefits of developing FLOW, however, if we get ahead of the game and become the country that is exporting the turbine technology and the components, rather than letting other countries get ahead, offering greater certainty and incentives to lure investors. Otherwise, we will find ourselves importing the very components that we could have been manufacturing here.

Unfortunately, the UK invests a lower percentage of GDP than our competitors, such as France, Germany and the US, and we spend a lower percentage of GDP on research and development. What we need to attract investment, and research and development is certainty, along with a clear strategy from Government. First, we need that strong commitment by Government to ramp up investment in FLOW at scale. For that, we need a generous budget in AR6 to allow a number of projects to go ahead. We need the scale so that companies see that it is worth while to invest in component factories in the UK. Scale will bring prices down and make investment economically viable. Companies need to see that more projects are definitely on the horizon. We need certainty, enthusiasm and commitment now, before those companies go elsewhere. We also need long-term clarity on the Celtic sea seabed leasing.

We need investment in our ports now. There is real concern in the industry that the ports are not being developed quickly enough and that investment needs to be much greater. We must recognise that they need huge capital expenditure now and that the revenue will not come until later through the FLOW projects. Although £160 million in grant funding is available through the FLOW manufacturing investment scheme, the FLOW taskforce has identified that some £4 billion will be needed for FLOW ports, so there needs to be a support mechanism for ports to manage that. There need to be interim measures now to ensure progress at pace and the development of a revenue support scheme to give long-term certainty and create assets that will attract investors.

Turning to the national grid, it is estimated that we will need to build some six times as much capacity in the next 10 years as we have in the last 10. I am sure the Minister is well aware of the challenges, but perhaps he could outline what steps he is taking to ensure that we have the capacity and skills for that vital development to take place. It is crazy to continue with a situation where companies are being paid to turn onshore wind turbines off simply because the capacity is not there to transport the cheap electricity to the densely populated areas where it is needed. The challenge to the grid capacity posed by FLOW is enormous, so I would be pleased to hear what the Government are doing in this respect.

Then, sadly, we come to our steel industry. If it were not so tragic, would be farcical. We have had the devastating news from Tata that it wants to close the blast furnaces in Port Talbot, followed a few days later by the news from Scunthorpe that British Steel have also proposed closing the blast furnace. Just when we want to invest in

[*Dame Nia Griffith*]

manufacturing the components for FLOW, we are losing the capacity to produce our own steel, and we will have to import more. It is no good saying that this is a green measure, as we know that iron ore will be being smelted with the same blast furnace process elsewhere in the world, quite likely with lower environmental standards. We lose jobs, there is no environmental benefit, it is a threat to our security, and we are more vulnerable to price fluctuations in the steel market, which will have an impact on our ability to manufacture the components for FLOW. Yes, we welcome investment in the electric arc furnaces, but that capacity is needed simply to try to mop up some of the 800 million tonnes of used steel that we export for recycling. Some grades of steel can only be produced in the blast furnace process at present. We need the investment in the technologies of the future to green those processes so that we can produce all the grades of steel that we need in the UK.

Then we come to the railway. The Government have a sorry record on the railway west of Cardiff. When Labour left office in 2010, we had committed to electrify the railway west of Cardiff at least as far as Swansea. Then the Conservative Government cancelled it west of Cardiff. After lobbying by MPs, the Government then relented and agreed to electrify to Swansea, but then they cancelled it again. Contrary to what the former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), said one day at the Dispatch Box—that it is not worth doing because it would not save time—it absolutely is worth doing to help reach net zero by using electricity from renewables, including FLOW, instead of dirty diesel. That will offer an opportunity to upgrade the line not just to Port Talbot, which is now clearly urgent, but on through Llanelli to Pembrokeshire.

To sum up, we have a unique opportunity now to become a world leader in floating offshore wind, bringing down energy costs, cutting emissions, and creating jobs in places like Llanelli. But it needs clear commitment and strategy from Government. I would be very grateful if the Minister could set out in detail what his Government are doing to ensure a sufficient scale of development to attract investment in the UK supply chain, enable rapid enough development of the port infrastructure in Port Talbot and Pembrokeshire, retain primary steelmaking in the UK, ensure the timely development of grid capacity and ensure that we have the skilled workforce we need for the green jobs of the future.

1.54 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Thank you for chairing this debate, Dame Angela. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing the debate and allowing us to have the opportunity to talk about floating offshore wind.

I really enjoy coming to Westminster Hall, where we can have a conversation in which we largely agree. In the main Chamber, it is not often that Conservative Members will stand up and I will agree entirely with the content of the speeches they make, but I think we are all pointing in the same direction on floating offshore wind; we all have the same ambitions for it.

Currently, two out of four of the floating wind groups in the world are in Scotland. That is a pretty amazing statistic, and it is amazing how much better it could be.

With the calls on AR6, the more we ensure that that happens as quickly as possible, so that we do not lose any more of the time that has been lost because of the farcical issues with AR5 and so that these projects have the confidence, ability and agreements with Government in place to go ahead, the more likely we are to be able to capitalise on this technology.

There are an awful lot of moving pieces—that was not meant to be a pun—in relation to this. An awful lot of things have to come together to ensure that it is as successful as possible. We have heard mention of grid connections: I would push the Minister again to ensure that, whatever happens with floating offshore wind, or, in fact, offshore wind in general, as much pressure as possible is put on to ensure that those grid connections are delivered timeously. Having spoken to a number of organisations that are leading the way on renewables, I think that not being able to get those grid connections is genuinely putting a number of the projects at risk. In some cases, the issue is communication, rather than the length of time. The length of time is not ideal—in fact, it is pretty bad—but if they will not even come back to say when the connection could be made, that causes problems. Even an increase in the communication on that would help investor confidence and would help with some of the final decision making needed in order for the project to go ahead.

Mention was made of some of the work being done here, and I agree with the hon. Member for North Devon that the budget needs to be large enough for multiple projects to go ahead. We have done incredibly well with ScotWind. Some of the clauses and requirements that were put in by the Scottish Government related to local content and developers having to ensure that they proved the work that they were doing with it. It is incredibly important: most people do not see Aberdeen as some sort of manufacturing hub, but the Minister will know very well that an awful lot of manufacturing goes on in and around Aberdeen. People see us as an oil and gas capital—an energy capital—but we make plenty of widgets, often for offshore work. A lot of that work is incredibly transferable as an awful lot of the incredibly precise instruments that are used for managing and measuring offshore oil and gas installations can be used for offshore wind, particularly once we get far away from the coastline.

On the transferability of skills, I understand that there has been something of an agreement between OPITO and the Global Wind Organisation, and a reset around passporting the offshore skills, and accreditations that are available. The relationship has been somewhat fraught in the past, particularly between some of the unions and organisations such as GWO. Anything the Minister could do to ensure that these organisations keep collaborating and working together would be in the interests of his and my constituents and all those around the UK who work in the offshore industry, so that they can use the skills they have already and so that new entrants can join the offshore industry without the need to go through multiple different, yet incredibly similar, training courses. Helicopter ditching training is the same whether someone is working in an offshore wind installation or working on an offshore oil and gas installation. There is very little difference. Anything that can be done to ensure that the passporting of those skills is allowed between the two industries will ensure that we have a better, more flexible workforce. The reality

is that there is an awful lot of companies currently working in both spheres. They are working in offshore oil and gas, and they are working in offshore wind and other renewables. Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas will particularly ensure that those two things are incredibly integrated. Just as the companies are working in those spheres, we need the individuals to be able to work in both of those spheres too.

I also urge the Minister to support—I am sure he does—Developing the Young Workforce to ensure that young people in school, particularly in our area of the north-east of Scotland, are not saying, “I’m not going into engineering, because my uncle was made redundant in the oil and gas industry.” I do not want young people to have that concern stopping them pursuing careers in science and technology, which I am quite concerned will happen. I do have a huge amount of confidence in DYW; I do not want to try and take away from that, and I am glad about what it has done. DYW was created as a Sir Ian Wood project, and it has put a link person in each of the secondary schools in the local area to ensure that businesses and secondary schools are linked and that we are creating a workforce for the future. But we need to ensure that science and technology jobs are sold to young people, who should not be scared away by previous family experiences.

In terms of science and technology and development of things, there is the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, and I was on the Bill Committee for the related Bill. I asked for ARIA to focus on renewable technology and on technology that would ensure we are moving towards meeting our climate change objectives, and towards net zero. The Government refused that. I do not imagine the Minister could tell me now, but at some point it would be useful to know whether ARIA has been directed in any sort of way to focus on green technology. It is important that with those cool, new inventions coming out as a result of that Government funding going to ARIA, we consider tackling the most important issue facing the planet today, and ensure that we meet our objectives in relation to that.

I have one last thing to say on jobs and on the transferability of skills. When we are building floating offshore wind, the likelihood is that if you are building a very large floating offshore wind platform, there will be people living out there to take part in the building. It will not be dissimilar to the kinds of routines that people undertake working on an offshore oil and gas installation. They will be doing three weeks on, three weeks off, they will be travelling in helicopters and they will be spending a significant length of time offshore. My constituents and other people working in the offshore industries have transferability of skills. They have a lifestyle set up to work on a three-and-three basis, so they will find it easier to transfer.

We have probably not spoken enough about how—I did make this point to Offshore Energies UK this week—that workforce has got the mindset and the lifestyle. It is not ideal that in Aberdeen we have a lot of women at home looking after the kids while the guy works offshore, but if your husband is working three weeks on, three weeks off, there is very little you can do other than have a part-time job. When we are trying to find that workforce, we need to think about the lifestyle choices that people are making, and realise that there is a workforce in Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, and

there is actually a workforce in a lot of places in, for example, the north of England. People who work offshore will be able to go and do it pretty easily.

I want to focus for a moment on the ownership of the wind that we have. I have been to visit the Kincardine wind farm—I went on a boat, and I was incredibly, unbelievably sick. I have not been on a boat since, and I will not be going on a boat ever again as a result, but it was an amazing thing to see up close—it was really cool. The flexibility of those wind turbines is immensely cool: they are able to turn and tip, and they are remotely controlled. I thought that wind farm was ginormous—the turbines are absolutely huge—but I was told that the ones that we are likely to have further offshore are something like three times the size; they will be huge pieces of engineering equipment, and it is really important that we have as much local content as possible.

Ports have been mentioned, and we need to work collaboratively with them. It is difficult to do that, particularly because ports have different ownership methods. In Aberdeen, we have a trust port that works on a different basis from some of the commercial ports. I do not envy the Government’s job of having to ensure those collaborations, but I encourage them to do that and ensure that, where a differential offer is needed for different ownership of port models, that is in place so that ports can speak to each other, and so they understand the impetus and the structure that drives and creates them.

Selaine Saxby: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words and her speech. Does she agree that, because we do not have the same learned past and piecemeal development, the Celtic sea is like a blank canvas, so there is an opportunity to take learning from elsewhere? We do not want ports to replicate each other, but they should work collaboratively to get momentum behind these projects.

Kirsty Blackman: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. That is exactly what needs to happen: one port should focus on one thing and another port should focus on another thing. I know the Government do not like to pick winners, but encouraging ports to work together collaboratively is not about squashing competition; it is about ensuring that these projects happen. I completely agree with the hon. Lady on that.

We previously called for tax relief or a subsidy scheme, like the US and the EU have, to encourage green energy companies to invest. It is pretty shocking that the Government of Malaysia own more of the UK’s offshore wind capacity than UK public bodies. I think UK public bodies should own it, but one of the issues is that pension funds have not had the flexibility to invest in a lot of renewable technology. Anything the Minister can do to push the Chancellor to ensure that pension funds have the extra flexibility to invest in green tech would be incredibly important. We know that these things will make money; they are technologies of the future.

In the North sea, we have the gold standard for offshore health and safety. We have been through incredible tragedies such as Piper Alpha, and therefore have incredibly high health and safety standards in the North sea. I would like much more floating wind to be developed in the UK, not just because it would be great for jobs and tax revenue, but because those incredibly high safety standards would be embedded at the very beginning

[Kirsty Blackman]

of the expansion of this technology. When we sell it around the world, people will look at what we have done here and, hopefully, embed the highest possible safety standards in all floating offshore wind anywhere around the world. Floating offshore wind does not have exactly the same issues as offshore oil and gas, but it is still very important that we have the best possible safety standards.

On consistency and certainty for companies, I am concerned that the UK Government's direction of travel on things such as AR5, and the Prime Minister's statements about cutting back climate change targets, including on net zero, have affected investor confidence. Since I became an MP, all that the energy companies have asked of me is that they have certainty, particularly on things such as tax regimes. Companies are genuinely finding it difficult to convince investors to invest in the United Kingdom, because investors are concerned that the Government will stop backing these things. The more positive statements the Government can make about things such as floating offshore wind, the more confidence they will give the industry to make final investment decisions and ensure that as many of these projects as possible go ahead, whether in the North sea or the Celtic sea.

2.10 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela.

We have had a short but very good debate, and the enthusiasm for floating offshore wind has come across loud and clear. The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), was right to say that there is a lot of agreement across the board about what we should be doing.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing the debate and on her very good speech. All the speakers so far have made a really good case for why we need a national industrial strategy that pulls together all these different levers so that we can get jobs, skills, infrastructure and energy all working in the right way and in the right places. Labour would certainly do that in government, and I ask the Minister to consider doing it as well.

The hon. Member for North Devon talked very politely about AR5—indeed, we will all talk very politely about it—but it was clearly a catastrophe. I would be interested in the Minister's views about the hon. Member's suggestion that we try to speed up the next process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) also made an excellent speech—my grandfather was from Llanelli, where he worked in a tinplate factory all his career. She talked about all the issues to do with floating offshore wind, as well as about steel, which was very interesting, and about the need for primary steel to remain in this country. Again, I would be interested in the Minister's views on that.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North talked enthusiastically, as she always does, about a range of issues, and she made some good points. The passporting of skills from oil and gas to renewables is really important. Somewhere in the mix, there is a big piece of work to do on that. We also need to look at things such as apprenticeships and how they work, because they are not flexible enough for today's environment.

At the end of her speech, the hon. Member said that the industry in general just is not confident about investing in the UK, and that is absolutely at the core of all this. Even though I have been in this role for only eight weeks, the sense I have is that every single person needs stability—we need stability, we need certainty and we need things not to chop and change. When the Prime Minister changes a target, as he did for the automotive sector, it sends a message to wider industry, prompting it to ask, "Why would we invest here when we're not really sure what is going to happen?"

Going back to floating offshore wind, moving away from fossil fuels and towards renewables is a huge opportunity, and floating offshore wind is at the absolute cutting edge of that change. As has been said, the technology represents a once-in-a-generation chance to create good, skilled jobs, bring down energy bills and put the UK at the forefront of the world.

The hon. Member for North Devon made the point that the price jump in energy was caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but of course the UK was worst affected because of our dependence on fossil fuels. So this is an opportunity to tackle that problem.

Analysis from the Global Wind Energy Council suggests that 80% of the world's potential offshore wind resources are in deeper waters, which fixed turbines simply cannot reach, as the hon. Member said. Floating offshore wind allows us to capture the power of the stronger, more consistent winds that blow further out at sea, to harness the unique advantages that our island status affords us and to breathe new life into economies and communities around the Celtic and North seas.

With innovation, the cost of FLOW could be below the Government's low wholesale price forecast as soon as 2032. There are loads of innovations in this space, such as artificial reefs, which can potentially help to enhance the marine environment as well. So there is a lot to be positive about.

We have already touched on the contracts for difference, which really was an energy security disaster: there was not a single offshore wind project bid, and two viable offshore projects missed out on long-term funding, adding to the cost of energy bills for families up and down the country. Of course, that catastrophe was avoidable. My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli said that the Irish Government managed to navigate their way through this. Recently, at a conference, I talked with the energy Minister in Ireland, who explained what they did. Basically, they are more agile and more responsive to the needs of industry, and the Government have hopefully learned lessons from that. Of course, we welcomed the news yesterday that the Government have set the strike price for the next round of bidding, but what will matter for the success of AR6 are the as yet undecided elements of the framework: how big the pot will be, and how the Government will support the floating offshore supply chain in the meantime. It would be helpful if the Minister responded to some of those issues.

As we have said, new floating offshore wind projects are vital to our move away from fossil fuels, and they can and should be the source of good British jobs. However, the Government's neglect of Britain's infrastructure and industry means that much of the benefit of projects that do manage to secure funding is likely to be felt elsewhere. Their allergy to strategic industrial

direction has meant that the largest floating offshore project in the UK had its foundations made in Spain and its turbines made and assembled in Rotterdam, and that the finished project was simply towed into Scottish waters. Jobs that could and should come to Britain are being held back by the fact that our critical infrastructure is not fit to support them. In the UK, we lack a clear route from project design to plugging into the grid—the grid has been mentioned before and will be mentioned again, and it is mentioned by every single industry representative I meet.

Our ports need major investment and upgrading to allow the manufacture and assembly of turbine components and their bases at the required size. Floating offshore turbines are mammoth structures, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North knows from her perilous trip to see one, and we need to be making them in the UK. There is great potential to revitalise port infrastructure in this country, and in Scotland and the Celtic sea, for fixed and floating offshore wind. The floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme, which closed for applications at the end of the summer, and which represents £160 million to be spent across the whole UK, will not make the difference we need without serious strategic investment in our ports alongside it. We need our ports to be advanced for the most cutting-edge technologies to make the strongest difference to jobs and to power generation.

The Conservatives have had 13 years to show they can get a grip on the move to clean energy. Labour's strategy is to drive this country's floating offshore wind industry forward. Labour's national mission for clean power by 2030 has set ambitious targets to rapidly expand the offshore wind industry as a whole, giving us 5 GW of floating wind power by 2030. We recognise the leading role that Britain can and should play in pioneering this technology, which is why we will help to accelerate floating offshore wind deployment and manufacturing. The national wealth fund will deliver renewable-ready ports, alongside good, well-paid jobs, hand in hand with the private sector.

Industry is still waiting for the Government to spend £160 million on ports; Labour will invest £1.8 billion over the Parliament to make sure our ports are renewable-ready and fit for the future, and we will use Great British Energy—a new, publicly owned energy company—to invest in floating offshore wind, so that Britain can lead the world. The market for floating wind is very new, meaning that Great British Energy can drive the sector forward, where the Conservatives have sat and left it alone. That will help to finally overturn the stagnation and offshoring of British jobs and manufacturing that has been caused by the neglect of the British wind power industry.

I hope the Minister can answer a few questions. Can he outline how the floating offshore wind supply chain is being supported in the absence of new projects in the past year? Can he update us on FLOWMIS? When will the allocations be given out? Can he ensure that the funding will be allocated fairly across the country, including in Wales, where there is such huge potential?

We talked about skills, and I would like the Minister to suggest that the Government might consider—perhaps in the autumn statement—some changes to the apprenticeship scheme, which would be helpful, and which Labour has called for. The grid is the single biggest obstacle we need to remove, and Labour has set out plans for how we will

speed up the removal of barriers. We will need four times as much grid infrastructure to be built in the next seven years as has been built in the last 30. It would be good if the Minister could tell us how he will do that.

Where the Conservatives have cast floating offshore wind off to drift, Labour will drive it forward. Where the Conservatives are letting global leadership on FLOW technology slip through our fingers, Labour will pick up the ball. Where the Conservatives have left critical infrastructure such as ports gather dust, Labour will see them renewable-ready at long last. People around the country, and across all political parties, want to see the potential of the British people and of our island's unique geography realised. I would very much appreciate hearing from the Minister how he will do that.

2.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Andrew Bowie): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair this afternoon, Dame Angela. After quite an exciting political week, it is a pleasure to end with such an—on the whole—agreeable and positive debate in Westminster Hall. I think we all agree on the potential of floating offshore wind and the huge contribution it makes to the United Kingdom, our economy and our drive towards net zero, energy security and independence.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby)—she is a friend—on securing this important debate. She has been a vocal champion of floating offshore wind at all levels—from her constituency through to the wider Celtic sea region—in her role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Celtic sea. She rightly highlighted the benefits that this new technology could bring to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Far be it from me to disagree with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), but the United Kingdom is actually one of the world leaders in floating offshore wind. The world's first floating offshore wind farm was built in UK waters. Since then, we have built a strong base of new projects and development to grow our industry still further. Indeed, in the oil and gas industry, which has already been referenced by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman)—my constituency neighbour—and which surrounds our constituencies, there are opportunities for floating wind to play a crucial role in decarbonising North sea production, by accessing deeper waters and providing electricity to those platforms.

Our 80 MW of currently installed floating wind capacity builds on our world-leading status in fixed-bottom offshore wind deployment—not that anyone would know it, listening to the Labour party. We have over 14 GW of installed capacity—the most in Europe—with the first, second, third, fourth and fifth largest offshore wind farms in the world generating power right now. Contrary to the Labour party's castigation of this Government's record, we have gone from only 7% of renewable electricity on the grid in 2010—when Labour left office—to 48% in quarter 1 of last year. We have decarbonised faster than any other G7 nation, at the same time as growing the economy.

The opportunity for floating offshore wind is significant. The Global Wind Energy Council has said:

“The market is nascent, but could be huge: 80% of the world's offshore wind resource potential lies in waters deeper than 60m.”

[Andrew Bowie]

That is too deep for fixed-bottom wind. The UK's Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult's Floating Offshore Wind Centre of Excellence has estimated that floating offshore wind has

“the potential to deliver £43.6bn in UK gross value add...by 2050, creating more than 29,000 jobs in the process.”

Our 5 GW ambition recognises that and the potential for floating wind to play a key role in our energy mix as we move steadily towards net zero. We are committed to building on the UK's position and to placing the UK at the forefront of the development of this exciting new sector. However, we know that 5 GW is a stretching ambition, and we are working hard to create the right environment for investment and to address barriers to deployment.

First, we recognise the crucial importance—raised today by every Member who contributed—of port infrastructure to floating offshore wind. That is why we launched the £160 million floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme—or FLOWMIS for short. That funding will help leverage the vital investment needed in port infrastructure to deploy floating offshore wind at large scale. FLOWMIS closed for applications on 27 August, and I can reassure Members that we are assessing all the bids we received.

Secondly, we recognise the importance of the right support mechanisms through the world-leading and envied contracts for difference scheme. The scheme is looked to worldwide as the model for how to support the deployment of renewables, and CfD auctions have so far awarded contracts totalling over 30 GW of new renewable capacity across all technologies, including around 20 GW of offshore wind. Last year's allocation round, AR5, was a success story for many technologies, including marine energy and the first three geothermal projects.

However, we recognise the shortfall in fixed-bottom and floating offshore wind, and I acknowledge the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon and others raised at the time and this afternoon. We reflected carefully on the results of AR5, and I trust that today's announcement detailing the parameters for next year's allocation round, AR6, demonstrates that we have listened and responded to concerns. The administrative strike price for floating offshore wind has increased from £116 to £176 per MWh—an increase of 52% in real terms from AR5—recognising the unprecedented upward pressure on project costs, which, as we have seen, have affected the industry worldwide. We hope today's announcement will bring forward viable floating wind projects as we look to boost investment in the industry.

Thirdly, we recognise the importance of a long-term pipeline of projects to give investors the confidence that they need to take long-term decisions. The UK has the largest floating wind pipeline in the world, based on confirmed seabed exclusivity, with around 25 GW already agreed, including through the ScotWind leasing round referenced today and the INTOG process.

Selaine Saxby: Could my hon. Friend clarify something in today's AR6 announcement? We all know that there were two projects ready to bid in AR5, and at this point there are two projects ready to bid. Now that the strike

price seems to be acceptable to all concerned, is there any opportunity for us to accelerate the decision for these two projects and then effectively to have an AR7 for all the projects in the next pipeline, so that we can get these ones afloat?

Andrew Bowie: I understand very much why my hon. Friend wants that to be the case, but we must recognise that one reason for the success of renewables, including in this country, has been the predictable options we have had. Developers are already planning for AR6 in March next year, and bringing the round forward any further could jeopardise it, not amplify it, so we are reluctant to do that. However, I hope the confidence the industry will receive from today's announcement means that AR6 will be a huge success. We all need it to be, and that is why we took that decision.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Crown Estate is also moving forward with its plans to launch leasing round 5, making available areas of seabed capable of supporting up to 4.5 GW of capacity in the Celtic sea. The Government fully support those plans, which represent the first opportunity for commercial-scale floating offshore wind projects in the region. We also recognise the importance of a long-term pipeline in the Celtic sea beyond leasing round 5. We will continue to work closely with the Crown Estate on that as we seek to realise the full potential and opportunities represented by floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea. The Crown Estate is due to make further announcements on its plans before the end of the year.

We recognise the importance of dialogue between industry and Government in driving progress. The floating offshore wind taskforce is co-chaired by industry and Government. Its first report, in March this year—“Industry Roadmap 2040”—has been highly informative in shaping our understanding of the specific demands on port infrastructure needed to support floating wind at scale. The taskforce is currently working on a vision to 2050, due for publication in quarter 2 next year, which will set out the potential prize that floating offshore wind could offer the UK.

We will continue to work closely with industry, through RenewableUK and the Offshore Wind Industry Council, to assess supply chain needs and opportunities for the UK and to develop an industrial growth plan—an IGP—to support the growth of sustainable supply chains.

Kirsty Blackman: On that issue, as I said, Scotland encouraged the conversation between developers and the supply chain. Are the Minister's Government doing everything they can to ensure that those who are bidding, and winning the bids, are working with the supply chains to get them upskilled as quickly as possible, and to ensure that they can make investments in the confidence that they will be able to create widgets for offshore wind farms?

Andrew Bowie: Widgets being one of the specialties of our region. There is always more we could do, and we should absolutely seek to push the boundaries and work as closely as possible with the industry—in lockstep with it—to ensure that the supply chain in the UK grows, creating the jobs of the future and ensuring that the pieces, the widgets and everything else that is required to develop a successful floating offshore wind industry is created here in the UK, bringing benefit to communities up and down this country.

The floating offshore wind taskforce is an important part of that process, and we now have our industry road map as well. We are working closely with industry to deliver that, but of course there is more that we can, and will, do. The Government are open to any suggestions as to how we improve that relationship more to ensure that we get to the place we need to go.

I was about to address the comments the hon. Member for Aberdeen North made regarding skills. I agreed with every single thing she said, which is not very rare, but it is quite rare. Creating a workforce for the future, for all the energy projects we are embarking on right now, is a personal passion of mine. We need to get young people engaging in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects at school. We need to grow the capacity of our further and higher education institutions to deliver the courses and create the apprenticeships with industry that we will need if we are to get people into the growing energy industry in this country. We need to ensure that the right processes are in place, so that those people who want to transfer, upskill and reskill from existing technologies and industries into new and emerging technologies and industries can do so.

The passporting issue the hon. Lady raised is incredibly important to that journey. As the Nuclear Minister, I am delighted to have set up the nuclear skills taskforce between my Department and the Ministry of Defence, to see what we can do to grow that workforce. Similar work is going on in the renewables sphere, and I am keen to see what we can do to work with the existing oil and gas industry, for example, to transfer skills and make that transfer much easier.

We understand that cost is a challenge for nascent sectors such as floating wind. We are supporting the sector with £31 million of funding, matched by £30 million from industry, through the floating offshore wind demonstration programme to explore innovations to help reduce the cost of deploying floating offshore wind technology. As part of its 2050 vision, the floating offshore wind taskforce is also looking to identify the key enablers of cost reduction and recommend specific actions to address them.

Finally, given my role as the Networks Minister, it would be remiss of me not to mention the grid, networks and connections, which have rightly been raised by all Members present—not a day goes past when another connection issue is not brought to my desk in the Department. We know that these issues are a significant barrier to the deployment of many renewables projects, and a challenge for our energy infrastructure more widely. In July 2022, the Government appointed Nick Winser to the role of electricity networks commissioner, to advise the Government on how to reduce the timeline for transmission network delivery by half. The commissioner's final recommendations were submitted to the Government and published on 4 August. We welcome his report and are committed to the direction of its recommendations. We have committed to publishing our response to those recommendations and an action plan imminently.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon knows, community engagement, respect and thought-through, sympathetic planning of onshore infrastructure is something I take a keen interest in. For all the reasons I have suggested, decarbonising the grid and increasing

capacity are important—in fact, they are vital—but they must be done with respect, sympathy and understanding of local communities and businesses. We must be willing to change, adapt and be flexible in those plans. My hon. Friend knows that, given the role of Ministers in the planning system in England and Wales, I cannot comment on specific projects, including the White Cross farm project that she referenced. However, the developers will have heard her loud and clear today and at other times. A response on community benefits, which she asked for, will also be published imminently.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely and important debate.

Kirsty Blackman: I mentioned the fact that communication from the grid is not always up to scratch. Will the Minister ensure that he does what he can to put pressure on? I know he is working on the speed, but we also need to make sure that communication is improved, so that developers know what is happening and when it is happening—even just when they will hear an answer.

Andrew Bowie: Absolutely. I assure the hon. Lady that I am working hard on that.

I hope I have demonstrated that the Government not only understand the challenges faced by this exciting new sector, but that they are taking concrete action to address them. The opportunity is there for the UK to firmly establish itself as a world leader in floating offshore wind, and we are determined to see this vision and opportunity realised.

2.34 pm

Selaine Saxby: I thank all hon. Members for taking part in the debate, and particularly the Minister and his team for their ongoing engagement ahead of AR5. I raised the matter of the strike price 22 times in the Chamber, and I think everyone is well aware of my views on AR5. I hope that we can rectify the issue as we move into AR6 and that the voice of my community of North Devon will be heard, because some of the issues we are dealing with locally will be replicated around the coast. We need to get these things right if communities are to welcome these developments, as they have done up until this point.

We also need to recognise some of the issues in AR6. Yes, we can forecast where this development is, but the planning is being rushed so that a bid can be made in AR6—if it cannot be made in AR6, it may not be made at all. That makes you wonder why those involved are bidding at all if they are not in it for the long term, but also whether we are creating some unintended consequences through the processes we are putting in place. I heard the Minister, but I asked 22 times last time, and I have asked a couple more times in this debate, if the Government might reconsider the speed at which we deliver AR6 for floating offshore wind.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered floating offshore wind.

2.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

Heritage Pubs

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered heritage pubs.

It is a real pleasure to serve under your guidance, Mr Vickers, on a topic that I know you care about, particularly when it comes to those edifices that might be willing to serve you a rum baba, which I know you are keen on.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for selecting my debate, even if it is on a Thursday when we know most MPs travel back to their constituencies, as indeed I would have done, so I am grateful to colleagues here today.

There are many people I should be thanking. First and foremost, I would like to thank the people of predominately Gornal and Sedgley, but also the wider area of Dudley and south Staffordshire, whose energy and dedication to the cause is second to none. I particularly thank the admins of the Facebook page, “Save The Crooked House (Let’s Get It Re-built)” for their unstinting voluntary effort at keeping the show on the road and for moderating the page. Why is that important? We know the police and the local authority have a painstaking job still to do, and things could be said that unwittingly militate against the common cause in a court of law.

I thank a former colleague of this place, though not in my time—Mr Greg Mulholland—for the part he has been playing supporting our efforts. Thanks also go to several others, including Campaign for Real Ale and Historic England. If I have forgotten to thank any person or institution, I apologise but many people have offered to help, including from overseas, such as in Canada, Australia, the US and even South Korea. The incident around The Crooked House pub has been reported on in broadsheets on every continent.

The demise of The Crooked House pub, while tragic in and of itself, has highlighted a much bigger issue nationwide. Put simply, the framework we have in place to protect our heritage pubs is simply not winning the war against unscrupulous developers or even against our changing socioeconomic environment, which means many establishments that were once profitable are not today. Our way of managing that decline most often leads to one outcome: the demise of the pub, often followed by the demise of the building, too. We need something better to be done.

There is an issue with councils underappreciating the risks to heritage pubs. Not enough heritage pubs have any listed protection, not least because everyone—the system, MPs—presume that pubs could be listed when, in fact, they are not. That happened with The Crooked House. Our system does not compel local authorities to keep a register of heritage pubs; it is voluntary. Historic England, which as I said earlier has been helpful, described the selection criteria that covers heritage pubs of note. It said,

“All medieval commercial buildings will be eligible for designation since they are exceptionally rare...Most buildings prior to about 1850 surviving in anything like their original form will be listable; intact contemporary details and fittings, both internal and external

(like shop fronts, tiled decoration, counters and back-fittings) may justify a high grade. As with all buildings after about 1850, rigorous selection is necessary. Given the high rates of attrition, however, all buildings which retain claims to special architectural interest, irrespective of date, deserve careful consideration. Intact modern retail architecture of note is surprisingly rare, however, so it is important to identify these examples as well.”

Historic England places significance on the date of 1850. The Crooked House was built in 1765, and it had no listing protections whatever. The system as it is failed. It may also be true that some very old buildings do not merit listing. The date per se should not be the only criteria, as Historic England makes clear, but a building such as The Crooked House is the repository of tens of thousands of individual memories. It is the home of the collective memories of the communities surrounding it over centuries. In this case, it saw the birth of the industrial revolution, coalmining, limestone mining and steelworking. It saw the trials and tribulations of a people to whom we owe so much. All that is now burned and pulverised. We need to do more to prevent that from happening again.

That is why I would like to see local authorities being required to hold and review, perhaps yearly, a register listing all heritage pubs. Local authorities should also develop their own risk register so that any event, such as an advert for sale, triggers a system for closer monitoring of what happens to the building. I am also calling for heritage pubs that do not have a listing status to receive immediate temporary listing protections upon an application for listing being made. That system works well in Wales. When it was established—by chance, may I say—that The Crooked House was for sale, an immediate listing application was made, but the building was burned and demolished within days. The listing process never stood a chance of becoming effective.

There was extensive debate on this matter during the progress of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, with Ministers concerned by the practical implementation of such a system, since the listing system operates slightly differently in Wales and there would be challenges over scale—this is what I have been told—in England. I respond by saying that those challenges should be circumvented. They should not be a barrier to doing the right thing. How many more Crooked Houses do we need? How many more times do we want to see our own history ripped out of the heart of our local communities before this challenge over scale becomes small enough to manage?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this important issue. He underlines the importance of heritage pubs and what they can do. I can think of three right away in my constituency. First, The Auld House in Moneyreagh was an old building that had to be renovated, and a new building has been erected, so a lot of the character has been lost, but the history of the Auld House is still there.

Then there is the history of Roma Hamill’s in Newtownards, which was blown up by the IRA back in the middle ’80s. Because of the bomb it had to be rebuilt, but it is a heritage pub in the middle of the town that has been there for generations.

The oldest one in Newtownards is now called The Parlour, but it was previously called The Old Cross. It was built in 1735. It is a heritage pub with real character,

real history and real tradition. Those are the things that the hon. Gentleman is talking about. I agree with him, and it is important that they are retained and that, for a generational thing and historically looking back, we can have them for the next generation who come forward.

Marco Longhi: I very much welcome that intervention. When we achieve the rebuild of The Crooked House perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I can celebrate it over a pint in one of the establishments that he has just mentioned.

The debate that I referred to earlier about the passage of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 concluded that a building preservation notice section would be a more appropriate tool than the Welsh system, and that is now section 105 of the Act. However, a date for its implementation is still to be confirmed. I am also unclear as to how we could quickly apply it to scenarios that can evolve as fast as the one involving The Crooked House. The timing of how quickly such protections can be implemented is a key element in making that approach effective. Therefore, I must conclude that temporary listing protections would immediately mitigate the risk for pubs that are worthy of listing even while they remained unlisted. How would a building preservation notice be quickly applied and be quickly effective? Perhaps the Minister could assist me by addressing that point in his remarks.

A clear risk to heritage pubs is when they are being sold, often at speed, to developers that do not wish to maintain the building as a pub, thus not allowing enough time for a buyer who might wish to continue using the building as a pub. That is also why I am calling the local planning authorities to treat said buildings with a presumption against change of use, a bit like the way in which green-belt land has a presumption against residential development.

I am also calling for the sale of heritage pubs to be restricted initially, for a period of 12 months, to buyers who intend to continue running them as pubs. Such a sale would be at a value predetermined by independent valuers assessing the pub as a going concern. Such a restriction might seem counterintuitive to Conservatives such as you and me, Mr Vickers, but it would allow for time to find a prospective buyer who wishes to continue using the pub as a pub.

Too often, heritage pubs close needlessly because of these short timescales and the imbalance between prospective publicans and property developers, who always have greater purchasing power when assessing the asset for alternative development. What I am trying to do today is to give these heritage pubs and these buildings a better chance. To be clear, however, if the 12-month period passes and a buyer is not found, the pub would return to the open market.

Many people I have spoken to often refer to the system of assets of community value to protect heritage pubs. Yes, there have been some examples of where that system has worked, but it was actually designed for the likes of community halls and church buildings, rather than for commercial buildings and going concerns, which have different and more complex dynamics. It is a system that also relies on the local community to find the money required within a short timeframe of just six months, if, indeed, authorities even accept that ACV

criteria have been met. Crucially, though, a freeholder can still refuse an offer to purchase their property under the ACV system.

A rich local community might more easily use ACVs, but many areas of the country cannot do so, and neither would the use of ACVs solve the revenue sustainability question, which is often unanswered even if the capital can be raised. Nevertheless, there is merit to ACVs, which is why I am also calling for local authorities to adopt a presumption in favour of ACV status being granted, and I ask that the ACV process be applied only after the 12-month sale restriction that I referred to earlier has ended. That would have the effect of offering local communities an 18-month window in which they could try to save their local heritage pubs, rather than having to work within the narrow six-month period under the ACV system.

I turn again to our much-loved Crooked House. There are questions arising from the event about the effectiveness of decisions taken by the fire service, the police service and the local authority, particularly on the management of risk. When the fire service attends and establishes suspicion of arson, that is communicated to the police, but the mechanism for that and how quickly it happens is unclear. While the site is still under a public service entity—if I may use that language a little loosely—the police attend and carry out their forensic work, at which point arson or otherwise is established. Crucially, even when arson is established—after which one might infer greater risk—the site by law is returned to the control of the freeholder.

There are clear questions for me on risk. Everybody in my local community was commenting that as soon as the fire had taken place, the building would be demolished. Notwithstanding specific instructions from the local authority not to do so, the building was immediately demolished. I must ask, therefore: is there a role here for legislation to step in and help prevent what was seemingly obvious to most from happening again?

To conclude, I will ask the Minister to reflect on the opportunities for substantially increasing remedies against breaches of existing and, perhaps, future law. What also seems apparent to most is that unscrupulous individuals simply factor in any of the current remedies, which are not particularly exacting, into their business plans. Thank you, Mr Vickers, and hon. Members for listening to me today. I look forward to the Minister's considerations and, I hope, his support when I bring forward legislative proposals.

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): I call Steve Tuckwell.

3.17 pm

Steve Tuckwell (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Vickers. Fresh from my maiden speech earlier this week, when I got to name-drop my local, The Middlesex Arms, I swiftly realised that I could not miss today's debate and in doing so pass up the opportunity to mention a few more gems in Uxbridge and South Ruislip, although colleagues have highlighted already that this debate is about more than just Members getting to name-check some of their local pubs.

Regardless of their location, whether in the city centre or down a winding country lane, pubs are central to our communities. They act as an anchor for local residents

[*Steve Tuckwell*]

and the community as a whole. They are more than just somewhere to sup a pint, whether it be something alcoholic or otherwise; there are pubs that now offer food as well. We are not talking about things like a traditional pack of pork scratchings or roasted peanuts but an extensive range of catering offering a variety of tastes. Pubs are community hubs, offering tea and coffee mornings for the lonely in our communities, mother and toddler sessions and so much more.

Our pubs have adapted and made changes in order to survive. I believe that pubs play an essential role in many people's lives and in their communities, and in Uxbridge and South Ruislip we have some great pubs. Through the trials and tribulations of covid, the lockdowns and the subsequent reopenings, we have seen pubs come under incredible strain, even more so in the light of the cost of living. However, in no area is there more strain felt than our heritage pubs.

Uxbridge and South Ruislip has a number of heritage pubs, which are long-standing historic centres of the community. The Three Tuns on Uxbridge High Street is a former coaching inn that is now a grade 2 listed pub, and was built between the 16th and 17th centuries. The Red Lion on Hillingdon Hill was built in the 1500s. Inside the historic building, visitors can find original Tudor fireplaces, original beams and even a vaulted cellar. The Malt Shovel, a 19th-century listed pub, was an important stop for those working and travelling along the country's canals during the golden years of the UK's waterways. It now provides fantastic canal-side drinking and dining.

Probably the most significant of these pubs locally is The Crown and Treaty. This 16th-century pub gets its name from a moment in history, at the time of the civil war, which intertwined it with Parliament, for it was at this pub, which counts for only a third of the former manor on the estate, that the royalists and parliamentarians came together to discuss a document that would become known as the treaty of Uxbridge. The meetings that took place at this pub formed a significant attempt at negotiated peace between the warring factions, three years into the English civil war. Demands from the parliamentarians that were deemed assertive, including the establishment of Presbyterianism in England and parliamentary control over military matters, combined with a royalist cause energised by recent military victories, ultimately doomed the treaty to failure. However, while the treaty may have ended up lasting just a few weeks, The Crown and Treaty itself has lasted for over 400 years, and is still going strong. In fact, it had its wood panelling returned to coincide with the late Queen's coronation in 1953, after it was sold to fit out offices in the Empire State Building in the 1920s.

The Crown and Treaty, The Three Tuns, The Malt Shovel and The Red Lion are not just heritage pubs; they are our heritage. They are more than just community hubs; they are the community. Within their walls—literally within their fibre—is the history of our communities: an unwritten, unspoken record. That is why the scenes and events surrounding The Crooked House pub were so tragic, and yet also so bewildering. Much has been done, especially the welcome changes in planning laws, so that pubs in England can no longer be converted or demolished without planning permission. I welcome

the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) about heritage listing and the need to be documented. This also falls alongside the introduction of enforcement powers. However, The Crooked House pub episode demonstrates that there is more that can and must be done to protect our heritage pubs. They are not just pubs. They are our communities; they are our history.

It is important that existing inspection processes are strengthened, and that enforcement teams are well resourced and empowered to act on the concerns around heritage pubs. As such, I join colleagues in asking the Minister about what more the Government are doing as the pressures on all pubs, but acutely heritage pubs, continue. In the light of The Crooked House tragedy, we need to ensure we can safeguard and protect our heritage pubs so that they survive for generations to come.

3.22 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Vickers. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) on securing the debate, and I commend him on his work campaigning on this issue after a pub in his constituency, The Crooked House, was demolished in a fire. That act sparked outrage not just across the country, but, apparently, internationally as well. His analysis of some of the difficulties and challenges that the sector faces were very much in line with our own. Certainly, some of the proposals deserve further consideration, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister on those specific points.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Steve Tuckwell) on following up a splendid maiden speech on Monday with another excellent speech. He articulated how important pubs are to the community and how they really encapsulate the history of a particular area. That is something we will no doubt be reflecting on today.

One of the main problems we face in this discussion is the lack of a clear definition of what a heritage pub actually is. We know that once they have that status, they are afforded protections to prevent them being demolished or having their character altered, but a very small number of pubs are afforded that most stringent grade I listed status. As recently as 2015, there were just 11 in England. Many historic buildings become non-designated heritage assets, which do not have statutory protections as designated heritage assets. They are therefore easier to alter or demolish. That means that many local pubs, including The Crooked House, are vulnerable to the wishes of developers or, indeed, vandalism.

As we know, there are some laws in place to protect pubs. Since 2017, planning permission has been a requirement for a change of use or demolition, meaning that there should be at least some chance for local communities to have a say. Of course, if planning permission was not sought, enforcement action is available, but, as we have heard, the issue with The Crooked House clearly showed that these laws are not always adhered to to the degree that we would like. CAMRA follows such issues closely, and it investigated 30 potentially unlawful conversions or demolitions between January and June this year. Although some had the relevant permissions, CAMRA reports that there are eight outstanding cases in England

in which enforcement investigations are under way or local authorities have not yet confirmed that a planning permission exists.

CAMRA registered its concern that local authorities have not been able to take robust enforcement action, which allows developers to flout the protections in place. I want to be clear: I do not believe that that is a result of indifference from or neglect by local authorities but simply a reflection of the financial pressures they have faced since 2010, which have meant that undertaking some of these very time-consuming and technically detailed investigations has become more of a challenge.

Unfortunately, The Crooked House is just one of a number of historic pubs that, in recent times, have suffered from a devastating blaze. The Leopard in Stoke-on-Trent, which had already submitted plans for redevelopment, was another recent example, and Hardy's Well pub in Manchester was another that suffered a similar fate. The former was frequented by Josiah Wedgwood, and the latter dated back to the 1830s, nearly two centuries ago.

Albeit to a much lesser degree, I have in my constituency an example of a historic, derelict pub that, I think, is on the danger list. It has been subject to fires in recent years—twice last December—as well as being vandalised and subject to fly-tipping. It is the Station Hotel in Ellesmere Port, and it is on the main route into the town centre so it is in a very noticeable part of our town. It is emblematic of the problems that our town centre and many town centres face. It was a magnificent building when it was first built; I was not alive at the time, but it boasted of having one of the longest bars in the country, if not the longest. That, in itself, is of historical note, but the pub is listed only locally and is not designated as a grade II listed building, so it does not have the degree of protection that I think the local community would like to see. Since the pub closed down, there have been a number of attempts to demolish it and redevelop the site, none of which have come to fruition. The worry is that, sadly, the next fire could be the last one, and a major part of our town's history will be lost for ever.

It is not all doom and gloom, though. A more positive local example is The Grace Arms on the other side of the town centre. It is another iconic and historic local building that was earmarked for closing six years ago, but, after campaigning by local residents and me, the owners, Greene King, decided to keep it open. They have put significant investment into the pub, changing the offer but ensuring the building continues to be a significant landmark in the local area. That is something local residents have been very pleased to see.

More broadly, there is concern about the future of pubs as a whole. The numbers and characters of pubs have changed rather dramatically since the start of this century. Statistics collected by the British Beer and Pub Association show that there has been a steady decline in the number of pubs since 2000, from about 61,000 then to about 46,000 last year. Indeed, reports suggest that the number of pubs in England and Wales in June this year stood as low as 40,000.

We know that financial pressures have played a large role in that. Office for National Statistics data shows a correlation between pubs closing and general difficulties in the economy, and we know that there has been quite a squeeze in the cost of living in recent years. That, I am afraid, has accelerated the closure of pubs. Recent

reports suggest that as many as two a day are closing. Figures recently published show that the number of pubs to have been either demolished or converted to other uses this year stood at 383 by the end of the second quarter of this year—almost the same number as closed in the entirety of 2022.

Hopes that there would be a recovery in pubs in 2019 were dashed by the covid crisis—we know the history—and now, the increase in the cost of living has made life much more difficult for people who want to run pubs. In general, those pubs that have thrived have changed in character—which probably should not be a surprise to us. One of the biggest changes has been to the size of pubs. There has been a large increase in the number of pubs that employ more than 25 staff, from 2,500 in 2001 to 4,600 in 2019. Given the overall reduction in pub numbers, that means we are certainly seeing a growth in the number of those larger pubs that we have never seen before.

It could be argued that the larger, ubiquitous national chains that we see in the pub sector possibly reflect wider changes in the hospitality sector. We should be mindful that these can create difficulty in the protection of the heritage status of pubs that we want to see. As hon. Members have mentioned, there has been a significant change in the number of pubs offering food. Indeed, the number of staff employed in pubs to serve food, compared with working behind the bar, has changed dramatically in recent years. That does not mean that the fabric and heritage of the pub needs to change; I think we can find a nice balance.

Overall, it is clear that the trends of decline we have witnessed are symptomatic of wider problems on our high streets. In many ways, they have been neglected: high streets are boarded up, and access to them is getting worse. Pubs are a major part of our local community. Many memories are formed there, and they are of course an important part of the local economy.

With the many challenges that the high street faces, we do not want to see any more loss than we have. We want to put local people in the driving seat. That is why Labour will be proposing a new community right to buy, giving local communities the opportunity to take control of pubs, community venues and, indeed, football clubs that come up for sale or fall into disrepair. That will go further than the current right to bid, and it will give communities first refusal on such assets when they come up to sell, including the right to buy them without competition. This is about allowing our communities to take back control of their environments, restoring civic pride, and ensuring that those iconic buildings, that we all know and love, can survive.

I absolutely understand this is part of a wider economic debate, and that there are real challenges. I hope the Minister will respond to some of my points. On that note, I welcome him to the Front Bench; I think this must be his first outing in the role.

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): Minister.

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): If only you had known, Mr Vickers, how long I have waited to hear that word, and then find myself rising to speak.

[Simon Hoare]

It is about eight and a half years since I was elected in 2015, so it really is a pleasure for me to say “It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship” this afternoon. First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) for raising this issue, which is important for him, his constituents and the wider community, and I compliment him on the measured way in which he did it. There is an irony in a teetotaller replying to a debate on heritage pubs and, having filled out quite a few forms with an ethics over the last few days as part of the ministerial process, finding the word “crooked” in the title of my first Westminster Hall debate did make me a little apprehensive.

To start, my hon. Friend suggested some potential legislative changes, or, certainly, those that may require investigation. My door, and the door of the Department, is open for him to come in at any time, and we can further those conversations. As the debate has shown, the issue is important on many levels. I was struck when my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Steve Tuckwell) said—I hope I quote him correctly—that these “are not just community hubs, they are the community”. How right he is. His rightness was, I suppose, only echoed by the rectitude of his constituents in returning him in the recent by-election, on which I congratulate him as a Conservative to a Conservative by-election winner. We have had not had many opportunities to say that in recent times, a trend that I believe will change pretty quickly.

Of course, no Westminster Hall debate would be complete without my friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who I thought would have been so relieved to have seen me out of the chairmanship of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that he would not have wanted to hear my voice again. But here he is, and it is always a pleasure to see him. It is little bit like Christmas cake, I suppose—even if one does not like it, you do not really feel that Christmas is complete without a Christmas cake on the tea table. No debate in this place is complete without my friend the hon. Member for Strangford.

Before I forget, my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North asked for the date for the implementation of the building preservation notice. That falls within the bailiwick of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We will inquire of ministerial colleagues about that, and I will write to my hon. Friend to make sure that he has an answer as to when that will come into effect.

I join my hon. Friend in thanking those campaigners, who are feeling such a huge sense of loss at this tragedy. It is a tragedy to lose such an important local asset. For many, it will feel like a bereavement: a loved building in a community has been suddenly taken away in circumstances that one can only describe as suspicious. They will be feeling that locally, so I join my hon. Friend in congratulating them for all their efforts, and I also congratulate him for corralling them in making those efforts to ensure that, although there is no way to turn the clock back, we try to identify ways whereby the opportunities for these sorts of events to happen—because one can never say that they will never happen—is militated against. My hon. Friend will understand that a live investigation is ongoing, and it would be remiss of me

to say anything that may in any way prejudice that investigation—campaigners would be furious with me were I to do so. I think that the debate has reflected that.

The building preservation notice is, of course, part of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which provides opportunities for councils to issue notices. Those preservation notices are in place for six months, and that is an important protection, particularly if a listing application is run alongside or in tandem with the notice. Like a lot of these things, they exist, but we often forget that they exist. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the opportunity to place on the record, once again, that the preservation notice exists.

The point about demolition is important. The demolition of a pub has a very particular status within the planning process. The demolition of a pub without planning permission so to do is considered, for the purposes of the planning system, to be development, and councils have an existing power to enforce a total rebuild. There is also the opportunity for fining if they refuse to comply with the enforcement notice, and that fining is unlimited. Certainly, my ministerial colleague, the Minister of State, pointed out to me that a building in the City of Westminster was demolished without the relevant consents, and the city council successfully enforced that it should be rebuilt brick for brick. So, in the case of that developer and those who seek to circumvent or circumnavigate our rules, undermining them for sharp practice, there are powers that can be used, and I would urge all local authorities to use them.

Many of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North raised in his speech are, of course, slightly tripartite in nature. Very often, we feel that life would be much easier if one Department had sole responsibility. Many of the issues that my hon. Friend mentioned obviously touch on policies within my Department, but also touch on policies within the Home Office, and he referenced the police, and on what I suppose many campaigners would say is the slightly—let me put it diplomatically—eccentric requirement that, once initial investigations have been undertaken, the site that has been investigated has to be handed back to the freeholder. I hope that I will not prejudice the investigation when I say that it would not take Hercule Poirot to raise an eyebrow with regards to the rapidity of the arrival on site of bulldozers, almost before the last embers of the fire had died out; I believe in serendipity, sometimes, but even that belief can be stretched beyond breaking point.

I have spoken to ministerial colleagues in my Department, and it is the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) who will lead on this; I am replying to today’s debate because he had previous duties. We are happy to take the lead as a Department and to organise a tripartite discussion between us, the Home Office and DCMS to try to work out whether we can iron out any wrinkles or make any tweaks to make the process a little easier to understand and implement.

I will say a few words on pubs and change of use. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), was right and sensible to talk about the change in our high streets, and the change in demand for pubs and how and where we spend our leisure time. When people seek a change of

use for a public house, it is to be expected that most local authorities, certainly in my experience, will ask for a number of reports to justify a positive determination of that application. They will certainly take into account the number of operational pubs in the area. They will seek verified reports of a sincere marketing campaign, where that pub asset has been advertised—has it been in the trade press or the local press, and so on? Were they seeking realistic offers, or were they trying to price it so far outside the market to effectively arrive at a position where they could not sell it as a going concern because they had been asking such a grossly inflated price?

If the applicant for the change of use does not satisfy any of those key tests—which, of themselves, provide a certain degree of comfort to residents and safeguards for those who use the assets—by definition, the presumption of a change of use is not to be given. As we know, no system is perfect, and it depends upon thorough analysis and the potential for buying in professional third-party advice to peer review those marketing documents. However, it is not an easy thing to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North has made a number of policy suggestions, and we will reflect on them. It is important to note, however, that there is always a temptation for Ministers to promise the Earth, as though with a stroke of a ministerial pen all problems will be erased and nothing bad will happen. Will buildings burn down? Yes, of course. We are not going to be able to eradicate that, but we need to make sure that the investigatory powers are there.

We also need to be careful, because there is a fine balance to strike—sometimes it would require the judgment of Solomon to do it—in the operation of the market. A freeholder can legitimately dispose of an asset, for a continuation of use within the prescribed use class or for a change of use, or to move it on to a further use if that building is deemed redundant. At the heart of what was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Dudley North and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, and indeed the shadow Minister, is that the community's requirements and desires need to be taken into account as part of the evaluation process. As we know, so much of our high street and leisure time is changing. However, I suggest—I hope uncontroversially—that nobody wants to see, merely for the sake of retention, buildings retained that will fall into a state of disrepair and decay, and which are of no asset whatsoever to our high streets and communities and will often have a negative societal impact during that period of degradation.

I will be careful on listing because that falls within the purview of DCMS. It is an important point. It involves a process, and there are always going to be ways of speeding up that process to give greater clarity and certainty. I take the shadow Minister's point on the need for a clearer definition of what we actually mean by a heritage pub. We have made great progress in the creation of assets of community value. They have made a significant contribution since they were introduced in 2011. Are they perfect? Is the mechanism un-clunky in all respects? Of course not. Could it be reformed or improved? Most definitely. That may well form the basis of conversations to be had with my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North as we move forward.

In conclusion, this is a serious issue. My late father always used to say, "If you're going to cheat, cheat fair." I know that that sounds like a contradiction in terms, but

most of our communities and constituents shy away from what looks to be sharp practice—something underhand, something designed specifically to frustrate and undermine a process of transparency and accountability. While none of us would resile from the human desire to generate a profit, sometimes that sharp practice, merely in the pursuit of profit, falls under that old phrase, the "unacceptable face of capitalism", which you and I will remember, Mr Vickers, from the comments of previous politicians on a number of points.

I share the concerns, anxiety and upset of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North and his constituents about this serious issue. I reassert what I said at the start: we stand ready to help and to do what we can, between the three Departments, to try to ensure that we can limit, as much as we possibly can, these circumstances happening again. Unfortunately, however, the circumstances that he set out at the start of his speech mean that people will not see the return of the Crooked House as they knew and loved it. I read history at university; there are some buildings that speak of history and times, and one could only envisage the times that a pub from 1765 has seen, the trials and tribulations that it has survived and the conversations that it has eavesdropped upon. It is a huge and serious loss. We shall let the investigatory authorities do their job, but we stand ready to help my hon. Friend and other communities to ensure that such important community assets have the strongest protections that we can possibly derive.

3.47 pm

Marco Longhi: I have been really encouraged by the comments from everybody today. Of course, a Westminster Hall debate would not be the same without a contribution from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and I thank him very much for his words. He certainly has pubs in his area that reflect the same characteristics that others have discussed today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Steve Tuckwell) really captured it well, as did the Minister. While pubs offer great food and beverages and can be a point of contact for people coming together—and how important those points of contact are, especially for people, perhaps older generations, who have isolated lives, in a post-covid environment—they are also the community, and they are our history.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) was very kind in his words towards me. He absolutely hit the nail on the head when he said that we need to be very clear about the definition of a heritage pub. I have not been successful in the private Member's Bill ballot, so there will be a ten-minute rule Bill, no doubt. That definition is absolutely central, so the hon. Member was very perceptive with those comments.

I am really encouraged by what the Minister said. When I saw the huge community grief, anger and frustration in the hours and days that followed the burning down of the pub and its demolition, it was clear to me that I wanted to be visible, and to be almost the person at whom people could vent their anger. We have had lots of local community meetings. I have formed a committee to support me in that, made up of CAMRA and other people, including some admins of the Facebook group that I mentioned, existing pub landlords and past ones. I was clear that I will do everything I can, within the

[*Marco Longhi*]

bounds that have been described today, to see justice served and the pub rebuilt brick by brick. We all know that it will not be exactly the same, but with today's technology, and the support that has been offered by the nearby Black Country Living Museum, which has special expertise in rebuilding heritage buildings, I want to see the pub rebuilt.

The third commitment that I made to my community was to pursue legislative changes in the appropriate way to try to prevent this from happening again anywhere in the United Kingdom. Clearly, something needs to be done. On the preservation of building notice, I thank the Minister for his offer to write to me. When he does, perhaps he could also explain how quickly something could be implemented, which is the key issue for me. I mentioned the interaction between police, local authority and fire service. If a protection notice is not already there, it needs to be applied with immediacy. It is time critical, so I would like to understand that point better.

Everybody understands and accepts that we cannot design risk out completely, but we can remove the incentives from those who would want to go about things in the wrong way, and create many more incentives to stop them doing so. That is our role, and I feel very encouraged by the Minister's offer to be the leading Department on this. I believe that from a planning perspective the chunk of it is there, but clearly DCMS and perhaps the Home Office have their part to play as well. I thank him for his offer, and thank you, Mr Vickers, for leading the way today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered heritage pubs.

3.52 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 16 November 2023

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Renewables Sector

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho): The Government have today published key details of next year's contracts for difference allocation round, Great Britain's flagship renewables auction scheme. This announcement cements the UK as a world leader in renewables, particularly against the backdrop of recent economic challenges for the sector globally.

In the first quarter of this year, 48% of our power came from renewables, up from just 6% in the first quarter of 2010. Our contracts for difference allocation rounds are a British success story and since 2014, contracts have been awarded totalling around 30 GW of new renewable capacity across all technologies, including onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal energy. This has improved, and continues to improve, our energy security by moving away from imported fossil fuels. And it is protecting consumers by ensuring they do not pay higher support costs during periods of high electricity prices, which are driven by volatility in international fossil fuel markets.

The UK is home to the world's largest operational offshore wind farm project, Hornsea Two (1.4 GW) which became fully operational in August 2022. As of October 2023, the UK is also home to the second, third, fourth and fifth largest operational offshore wind farm projects in the world, all thanks to our leading contracts for difference model.

Today's announcement

Allocation round 5 was a success for many technologies, including marine energy and, for the first time, three geothermal projects. But we recognise the shortfall in fixed and floating offshore wind. We have reviewed the design of allocation round 6 to ensure the scheme continues to encourage competitive and sustainable outcomes, driving benefits for industry and consumers.

We have seen global challenges over the last year, posed by inflation in production costs across the economy, impacting technologies from renewables to gas to nuclear. The Government have today published key details of the sixth contracts for difference allocation round, opening in March next year. In light of the global volatility for the offshore wind sector, we have comprehensively reviewed our evidence base, which has informed today's announcement, and also engaged with industry to benchmark our analysis. Today's updates, therefore, set out an uplift to the administrative strike prices and that allocation round 6 will feature three pots.

The administrative strike prices are the auction ceiling prices for each technology. Reflecting on last year's auction and in light of inflationary pressures in the supply chains, these have been increased, and are intended to balance participation in the auction with ensuring

good value to bill payers. The actual price projects will receive will be set by the competitive auction. We recognise this will also be an important round for supply chain companies, and the new administrative strike prices reflect the need to support a sustainable supply chain, including companies who have recently made investments in new manufacturing facilities here in the UK.

Considering the strength of the offshore wind pipeline, we are announcing that allocation round 6 will feature three auction pots, with offshore wind in its own auction pot. A three-pot structure will drive support across Britain's diverse portfolio of renewable technologies and help the UK deliver on its ambition of up to 50 GW of offshore wind by 2030, including up to 5 GW of floating offshore wind. Other documents related to allocation round 6 published today include the draft "Allocation Framework"—the rules and eligibility requirements for the 2024 round—and the "Administrative Strike Price Methodology", a document explaining how the administrative strike prices are determined.

A route to lower bills

Macroeconomic conditions are placing upward pressure on costs for all electricity generating technologies. The Department will be publishing updated analysis comparing the cost of electricity generation across renewable and non-renewable technologies by the end of March 2024, reflecting the latest evidence, including on global market shifts. Existing analysis shows that renewables form the bedrock of a low-cost energy electricity system. This is in line with the conclusions from the Office for Budget Responsibility's "enhanced levelised cost" analysis from 2023.¹

Last year, volatile global gas prices drove electricity prices to record highs many times greater than the administrative strike prices set out today. This led to the Government stepping in and paying around half of people's energy bills last year. It also saw renewable generation paying back hundreds of millions into the contracts for difference, reducing the amount needed to deliver our energy support schemes. Going forward, we agree with the Climate Change Committee that oil and gas will remain an important part of our overall energy mix when we reach net zero by 2050. However, our reliance on gas for electricity production today risks making power prices higher than they would be in a system with a greater share of generation from wind and solar. We must therefore continue to reduce our reliance on gas for electricity production in a way that maintains energy security. Moving to home-based, clean power mitigates risks to bill payers, now and in the future.

Driving our renewable energy manufacturing industry

The contracts for difference scheme has been successful in driving down the price of renewable energy deployment, but this has presented challenges for sustainable renewable energy supply chains in competing for business, particularly as they have been struggling under difficult market conditions since the covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. I am therefore also publishing a consultation today on the introduction of new sustainable industry rewards into the allocation round from 2025, which will provide additional funding through the contracts for difference to support projects that invest in more sustainable supply chains.

The core parameters published today demonstrate we are investing in our booming renewables sector. We are backing our world-leading offshore wind sector, delivering

enough offshore wind to power the equivalent of every home in Britain by 2030. I am committed to a successful allocation round 6, which drives value for money for consumers. This will also be important in helping achieve energy security, decarbonising our power system by 2035, and hitting our net zero targets by 2050.

¹ Office for Budget Responsibility, Fiscal Risks and Sustainability, July 2023, pp.82-3: <https://obr.uk/frs/fiscal-risks-and-sustainability-july-2023>

[HCWS40]

Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Amanda Solloway): This statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by Net Zero Teesside Power Ltd and Net Zero North Sea Storage Ltd for a full-chain carbon capture, usage and storage project, which includes a new gas-fired electricity generating station, with a post-combustion carbon capture plant, gas, electricity and water connections, and a CO₂ pipeline network, located on Teesside.

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 current statutory deadline for the decision on the Net Zero Teesside project is 16 November 2023.

The Secretary of State has received new information from a statutory consultee, and has decided that it is necessary to set a new deadline of no later than 16 February 2024 for deciding this application to enable the Department to ensure there is sufficient time to consider this new information and to conduct the necessary consultations with interested parties.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS39]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Building Safety Update

The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley): Today, for the first time, the Government are publishing comprehensive remediation data on the progress made to fix residential buildings over 11 metres with unsafe cladding in England.

The laws passed by this Parliament and the actions taken by this Government since 2021 have systematically broken impasses on thousands of buildings. Through the Building Safety Act 2022, we have delivered the most substantive reforms to building safety in nearly 40 years and leaseholders have been given significant legal protections from unfair remediation bills.

All residential buildings above 11 metres in England now have a pathway to fix unsafe cladding, either through a taxpayer-funded scheme or through a developer-funded scheme.

Following intensive talks with the home-building sector, we have a solution that will see industry take responsibility for fixing fire safety defects. Where developers or building owners are not currently funding cladding remediation, the Government have committed £5.1 billion to ensure that people are safe and feel safe in their homes.

Summary of progress

2023 has seen a step change both in the framework for, and progress of, remediation. Thousands of buildings have been identified and are now making progress on their journey. Significant additional pressure is being applied to those that are yet to begin. Developers are now clearly aware that they must step up to fix buildings that they are responsible for. And, month on month, more and more buildings are completing their remediation and allowing residents to move on with their lives after such a difficult period.

At the end of October 2023, the following progress can be reported:

1,512 buildings have now formally started remediation work (up from 749 at the end of 2022);

Of those, 703 have completed that work (57% above December's figure of 448);

A further 2,285 buildings are preparing to begin works (up from 853 at the end of 2022). Every month will see further progress, supported by one of five initiatives that are underway: the ACM Cladding Remediation fund, which has been open since 2018 and covers buildings with the most dangerous Grenfell-type cladding;

the Building Safety Fund, first opened in 2020 for buildings over 18 metres;

the Cladding Safety Scheme, which was fully opened in July for buildings between 11 and 18 metres and is also open to new applications for 18 metre+ buildings outside of London;

the more than 1,000 buildings for which developers have now assumed direct responsibility for remediating all life-critical fire safety defects, and;

the work underway by social housing providers to remediate buildings in their portfolios which require remediation.

Progress made by developers to fix buildings they are responsible for

The Government have always been clear that the primary responsibility for resolving any building safety issues lies with those responsible for the creation of the issues. Prior to 2023, only a small number of buildings were being remediated by the developer who originally constructed them. This has changed significantly since the spring, when 51 developers agreed to take full responsibility for all life-critical fire safety defects on at least 1,342 buildings, at an estimated cost of £2.7 billion.

Since the summer, the Government have required developers to submit regular updates on the progress on remediation of these buildings. For the first time, we are publishing information on how each developer is performing. Of the 1,342 buildings in scope, so far works have been completed on 262 and are underway on a further 211, and clear plans are in place to remediate a further 506. There are currently 363 buildings without a finalised remediation plan.

We are clear with developers that they need to work quickly and that leaseholders in each property need to have clear information about when further progress is likely to be made. I expect all developers to make significant progress on assessing their buildings by the next data release, confirming start dates for works,

pushing forward with works, and updating residents and leaseholders. Should developers not move at a reasonable speed, we will take the necessary action. We also call on the freeholders of these buildings to co-operate with developers, by providing access for assessments and making sure the works can start as quickly as possible.

Government-supported schemes to remediate

Where no responsible developer can be identified, the Government now has three wide-ranging schemes open to address fire risks in buildings which have unsafe cladding. To prioritise those buildings with the most dangerous Grenfell-type cladding, the ACM Cladding Remediation Fund was opened in 2018. This was followed with the Building Safety Fund, which covers all relevant properties over 18 metres, in 2020. The Cladding Safety Scheme was opened in full in July 2023, after an eight-month pilot, to cover eligible buildings between 11 and 18 metres, as well as new applications for 18 metre+ buildings outside London.

Six years into the ACM scheme, almost all buildings with ACM cladding (96%) have now been fixed or are in the process of being fixed. There are 22 buildings yet to start ACM remediation. Two buildings are vacant and therefore do not pose a risk to resident safety. 15 buildings have start forecasts and four buildings without a start forecast have had local authority enforcement action taken against them. The remaining building has a remediation plan in place. We continue to work to reduce the remaining number through extensive work with the local enforcement authorities and direct contact with the responsible entities.

Progress within the Building Safety Fund is also gaining momentum, with almost half of eligible buildings either having started or completed works. The proportion of in-scope buildings with works completed has more than doubled since the beginning of the year, rising from 96 (8%) to 199 (20%). A further 27% of buildings now have works underway (up from 20% in December). We continue to work with partners in the Greater London Authority and Homes England with urgency to increase the number of buildings going through their remediation journey.

The full opening of the Cladding Safety Scheme in July 2023 marked the culmination of our extensive work to ensure that buildings between 11 and 18 metres have a pathway towards remediation. The pilot opened in November last year, and over 325 buildings from the pilot phase are progressing through the application system. The scheme opened in full in July this year; as of October 2023, there are almost 1,000 buildings at various stages of the application process. 48 buildings have now been issued or have signed grant funding agreements with Homes England, which is delivering the CSS on our behalf. Our focus now will be to extend support and raise its profile over the coming months for those buildings which have not yet got involved. Leaseholders and residents who believe their building should be in the scheme can inform Homes England, which will investigate each building, and pull them into the programme where appropriate.

Department officials are working with the regulator for social housing to assess progress of remediation in the social sector. I welcome their publication of the findings of a Fire Safety Remediation Survey that over 1,500 registered providers were asked to complete. Providers reported having a combined total of 15,405 11 metre+ buildings, of which 1,608 are known to require cladding

remediation work. Remediation works are complete in 7% of these buildings; works have started in 25%; plans for works are in place in 37%; 32% of buildings still lack clear plans, and this must change. All providers should expect to provide quarterly updates on progress of remediation, and I have written to 14 larger local authorities who did not provide a return in response. The next survey will be commissioned shortly and future departmental publications will include data on a provider-by-provider basis. I expect all providers of social housing to identify, assess and remediate their buildings at pace, and we are working with the regulators to ensure that this happens.

Enforcement

Finally, building owners who are continuing to stall should know they are running out of time if they are trying to avoid being forced to act. Leaseholders and residents who have concerns about remediation progress for their building should report this to their local authority or fire and rescue service. Local authorities are enforcing against freeholders failing to remediate high-rise buildings at sufficient pace and, as an example, Newham Council has recently successfully prosecuted a freeholder for failure to comply with enforcement action under the Housing Act 2004. For the most egregious of cases, the recovery strategy unit is pursuing companies and individuals through any means necessary, and currently has 19 legal cases underway against freeholders.

The publication of broader remediation data today is another step in the journey to ensure further transparency on the achievements to date, the work underway and, crucially, where more focus is needed. We are determined to both confirm progress where it is happening and shine a light on those parts of the sector where further attention is needed.

Ensuring buildings are safe requires a significant, involved and prolonged effort. The pace of remediation has, happily, stepped up significantly over recent months but we recognise there remains much more to do. We remain committed to making further progress in the months ahead.

[HCWS41]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Online Safety Act: Super-complaints Consultation

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Michelle Donelan): The Government are working at pace to ensure that the new online safety regulatory framework set out in the Online Safety Act 2023 is fully operational as quickly as possible. Today we are launching the first consultation related to the Act on the eligible entity criteria and procedure to be used for the super-complaints regime.

Super-complaints will play an essential role within the framework as they will allow for complaints about systemic issues to be assessed by the regulator. They will ensure that Ofcom is made aware of systemic issues users are facing which it may not be aware of otherwise.

To support the implementation of the super-complaints regime, the Secretary of State has the power to make regulations setting out the criteria a body must meet in order to be eligible to submit a super-complaint to Ofcom: the eligible entity criteria. The Secretary of

State is further required to make provisions about procedural matters related to super-complaints. This can include requirements such as the form and manner of such a complaint, steps that Ofcom must take in relation to it, and time limits for each step.

In developing these regulations, the Government view is that the eligible entity criteria should allow systemic issues to be raised effectively, while ensuring that super-complaints are high quality and evidence-based. This approach will focus Ofcom's resource on genuine problems. Similarly, we are seeking to create a super-complaints procedure which is clear, fair and effective.

In order to ensure that the regulations are informed by the expertise of civil society organisations and the wider public, a full consultation has been launched today and will run for eight weeks. We welcome responses to any, or all, of the proposed questions.

The consultation will use the Qualtrics survey tool. For those unable to access the tool, a PDF copy of the survey can be found at: Online Safety Act - Super-Complaints Consultation. A copy of the consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on gov.uk.

[HCWS37]

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equality and Human Rights Monitor Report

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): Today the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has published its report, "The Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023."

The report can be found on the EHRC website later today. The EHRC has a statutory duty—under Section 12 of the Equality Act 2006—to monitor progress on equality and human rights in Britain and publish its findings every 5 years. "The Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023" outlines the changes the Commission has observed in equality and human rights in England, Scotland and Wales over the last five years, since its last report, "Is Britain Fairer?" (2018).

Based on the Commission's comprehensive measurement framework, this report analyses outcomes in all aspects of life in Britain, across all nine protected characteristics. It is based on their own robust statistical analyses, a systematic review of research evidence and the responses to a public call for evidence, as well as input from a broad programme of stakeholder engagement.

I would like to thank Baroness Falkner and the Commission for their work on this report.

The report has been published on gov.uk and will be laid in Parliament on Monday 20 November, once the House of Lords returns.

[HCWS42]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Back to Work Plan

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mel Stride): Later today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and I will announce a new back to work plan. This is a package of employment-focused support that will help

people to stay healthy, to move off benefits and to move into work, which will form part of the Chancellor's autumn statement on 22 November.

The number of people economically inactive due to long-term sickness has risen to a record high of 2.6 million, and the number of people who are on unemployment benefits is expected to grow over the coming years. With almost 1 million vacancies in the economy, it is vital we ensure that every opportunity is given to those who can work.

Our back to work plan will tackle economic inactivity by addressing the rising flow of people out of work due to long-term sickness and enhancing back to work support for the long-term unemployed.

Our back to work plan will not only help disabled people and those with a long-term illness to overcome barriers to work; it will also provide support for people currently employed to take preventive action and help them stay in or return to work quickly. Fast access to the right type of joined-up work and health support can prevent people falling out of work, ensuring they reap the physical, financial and mental benefits of being in work.

To address the rising flow of people out of work, we are formally launching our new WorkWell service, announced at the spring Budget. This will be delivered by my Department, and the Department of Health and Social Care, and will support almost 60,000 long-term sick or disabled people to start, stay and succeed in work through integrated work and health support. A prospectus launched in the coming weeks will provide information for all integrated care systems across England to develop their localised work and health strategies. The service will then be delivered in approximately 15 pilot areas.

Our flagship universal support programme will also be expanded to reach more people. It is a new, voluntary employment programme for economically inactive long-term sick or disabled people who are experiencing additional barriers to employment. Universal support offers individuals up to 12 months of "place and train" support from a dedicated keyworker, helping them to find a suitable role and offering personalised support. In addition, we will explore reforming the fit note process to provide individuals whose health affects their ability to work with easy and rapid access to specialised work and health support.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will also introduce measures that reinforce our efforts to join up employment and health support and expand access to mental health services, tackling one of the main reasons for sickness absence. This includes a significant expansion in access to NHS talking therapies and individual placement and support, building on the evidence that these programmes deliver positive health and employment outcomes.

The back to work plan will also support more people on unemployment benefits who are able to work to get back into work. This means earlier, more intensive support for those who find themselves out of work, reducing flows to long-term unemployment. We will provide upskilling, job search support, practical work experience and tailored advice to support claimants to sustain themselves and actively participate in growing our economy. This will include a phased roll-out where

we will expect claimants to either take up a job, take up mandatory work placements, or engage in a programme of intensive activity to get them off benefits and into jobs. This also means more intensive contact with claimants and smarter case monitoring to make sure that they are not forgotten and that they do not fall behind in their journey back to work.

There are some unemployed people who resolutely refuse to engage in job-seeking activities and continue to receive benefits. They are able to work, and it is not fair on taxpayers who contribute to our welfare system. For this reason, we are toughening the application of sanctions for those who fail to comply with expectations on job searching. Our welfare system should be a safety net for those genuinely not able to work or only capable of limited work, and provide a springboard for those capable of working to help them back into employment as quickly as possible. As a result of these reforms, no claimant should reach 18 months of unemployment in receipt of their full benefits if they have not taken every reasonable step to comply with jobcentre support.

This package will help up to 1.1 million people over the next five years: rewarding fairness; boosting labour market participation; growing our economy; and just as importantly, changing lives.

[HCWS43]

**Office for Nuclear Regulation Annual Report
and Accounts 2022-23**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Paul Maynard): Later today I will lay before this House the “Office for Nuclear Regulation Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023”. This document will also be published on the ONR website.

I can confirm, in accordance with Schedule 7, Section 25(3) of the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to the published document on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS38]

Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 16 November 2023

WORK AND PENSIONS

Youth Unemployment

The following is an extract from the Work and Pensions questions on 13 November 2023.

Lee Anderson: I visit businesses on a weekly basis, and one thing they tell me in Ashfield is that they struggle to recruit apprentices. One of the barriers is the requirement for English and maths, because a lot of these young people would make great apprentices but they either messed about at school or have not had that support. What more can we do to get those young people into apprenticeships, and then support them with their maths and English at a later stage?

Mims Davies: We fund apprentices to achieve English and maths qualifications by the end of their apprenticeships. We understand how important they are for people's long-term career prospects, and we are boosting the rate for those qualifications by 54% from January. We are also piloting flexible English and maths requirements for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, to ensure that they are not overlooked when it comes to apprenticeship opportunities.

[Official Report, 13 November 2023, Vol. 740, c. 366.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies).

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson). The correct response should have been:

Mims Davies: We fund apprentices to achieve English and maths qualifications by the end of their apprenticeships. We understand how important they are for people's long-term career prospects, and we are boosting the **funding** rate for those qualifications by 54% from January. We are also piloting flexible English and maths requirements

for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, to ensure that they are not overlooked when it comes to apprenticeship opportunities.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Supporting Parents into Work

The following is an extract from Work and Pensions questions on 13 November 2023.

16. **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support more parents into work. [900017]

The Minister for Employment (Guy Opperman): There have been transformational changes in childcare, skills, training and support for future employers, as announced at the spring Budget. It is absolutely the case that from April 2024, eligible working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare per week from the term after the second birthday, plus there will be the delivery of more support for working parents of children over the age of nine months with 30 free hours of childcare. **There is nowhere in the world that compares with our childcare offer** on an ongoing basis. We have virtually Scandinavian levels.

[Official Report, 13 November 2023, Vol. 740, c. 371.]

Letter of correction from the then Minister for Employment, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman):

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) during Work and Pensions questions. The response should have been:

The Minister for Employment (Guy Opperman): There have been transformational changes in childcare, skills, training and support for future employers, as announced at the spring Budget. It is absolutely the case that from April 2024, eligible working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare per week from the term after the second birthday, plus there will be the delivery of more support for working parents of children over the age of nine months with 30 free hours of childcare. **Our childcare offer, on an ongoing basis, is at virtually Scandinavian levels.**

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 16 November 2023

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|--|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| CHURCH COMMISSIONERS | 780 | CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—continued | |
| Engagement with Children and Young People | 780 | Independent Football Regulator | 771 |
| Lichfield Cathedral Summer School | 781 | Journalists in Conflict Zones..... | 770 |
| Antisocial Behaviour and Drug-related Crime | 784 | Music Education | 773 |
| Asylum Seekers and Refugees | 784 | Topical Questions | 776 |
| Manipur: Attacks on Churches and Christian Communities..... | 783 | Tourism Industry: Devon and Cornwall..... | 770 |
| Parish Ministry | 785 | UEFA Euro 2028 | 774 |
| Same-sex Relationships | 782 | ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE | 782 |
| CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT | 767 | Online Political Advertising: Regulation | 782 |
| Artificial Intelligence: Creative Sector..... | 767 | Party Spending Limits | 780 |
| Commercial Radio and Television | 773 | RESTORATION AND RENEWAL CLIENT BOARD | 786 |
| EU Exit: Creative Industries in Scotland..... | 776 | Women in Construction | 786 |
| Horsereading | 769 | | |

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 16 November 2023

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO | 53WS | WOMEN AND EQUALITIES | 59WS |
| Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects | 55WS | Equality and Human Rights Monitor Report..... | 59WS |
| Renewables Sector | 53WS | | |
| LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES | 55WS | WORK AND PENSIONS | 59WS |
| Building Safety Update..... | 55WS | Back to Work Plan..... | 59WS |
| SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY .. | 58WS | Office for Nuclear Regulation Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 | 62WS |
| Online Safety Act: Super-complaints Consultation | 58WS | | |

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Thursday 16 November 2023

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| WORK AND PENSIONS | 8MC | WORK AND PENSIONS | 7MC |
| Supporting Parents into Work | 8MC | Youth Unemployment..... | 7MC |

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not later than
Thursday 23 November 2023

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CONTENTS

Thursday 16 November 2023

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 767] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Speaker's Electoral Commission Committee
Church Commissioners
Restoration and Renewal Client Board

Business of the House [Col. 789]

Statement—(Penny Mordaunt)

MPs Staff: Employment Conditions [Col. 808]

Motion—(Penny Mordaunt)—agreed to

COP28 [Col. 818]

Motion—(Graham Stuart)—agreed to

Court Transcript Costs [Col. 845]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Floating Offshore Wind [Col. 1WH]
Heritage Pubs [Col. 19WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 53WS]

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 7MC]
