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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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

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House of Lords

Wednesday 11 May 2022

3 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Derby.

Schools Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.07 pm

A Bill to make provision for the regulation of Academies; about school and local education funding; about the attendance of children at school; about the regulation of independent educational institutions; about teacher misconduct; and for connected purposes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ashton of Hyde (on behalf of Baroness Barran), read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.08 pm

A Bill to provide for certain social security rules which apply where life expectancy is 6 months or less to apply instead where life expectancy is 12 months or less.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ashton of Hyde (on behalf of Baroness Stedman-Scott), read a first time and ordered to be printed.

UK Infrastructure Bank Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.08 pm

A Bill to make provision about the UK Infrastructure Bank.

The Bill was introduced by Baroness Penn, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Procurement Bill [HL]

First Reading

3.09 pm

A Bill to make provision about procurement.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ashton of Hyde (on behalf of Lord True), read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Ukraine: UK Military Support

Commons Urgent Question

3.09 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con): My Lords, I appear on behalf of myself.

With the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer given by my honourable friend the Minister for Defence People and Veterans in another place. The Statement is as follows:

“The United Kingdom strongly condemns the appalling, unprovoked attack President Putin has launched on the people of Ukraine. We stand with Ukraine and continue to support its right to be a sovereign, independent and democratic nation.

The United Kingdom and our allies and partners are responding decisively to provide military and humanitarian assistance. This includes weapons that help Ukraine’s heroic efforts to defend itself. We have sent more than 6,900 new anti-tank missiles, known as NLAWs, a further consignment of Javelin anti-tank missiles, eight air defence systems, including Starstreak anti-air missiles, 1,360 anti-structure munitions and 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives.

As Ukraine steadies itself for the next attack, the UK is stepping up efforts to help its defence. As we announced on 26 April, we will be sending 300 more missiles, anti-tank systems, innovative loitering munitions, armoured fighting vehicles, and anti-ship systems to stop shelling from Russian ships.

The UK has confirmed £1.3 billion of new funding for military operations and aid to Ukraine. This includes the £300 million the PM announced on 3 May for electronic warfare equipment, a counterbattery radar system, GPS-jamming equipment and thousands of night vision devices. The MoD retains the Humanitarian Assistance Task Force at readiness, with a headquarters at 48 hours’ readiness and the remainder of the force at five days’ notice to move should their assistance be requested.

The UK has pledged £220 million of humanitarian aid for Ukraine, including ‘granting in kind’ to the Ukraine armed forces over 64,000 items of medical equipment from the MoD’s own supplies. We are ensuring that the UK and our security interests are secured and supporting our many allies and partners, especially Ukraine.”

3.12 pm

Lord Coaker (Lab): My Lords, we remain united with the Government in their condemnation of Russia and the actions that they have taken so far in meeting this threat. Once again, we also recognise the bravery of the people of Ukraine. We therefore fully support the Government’s recent announcement of the additional £1.3 billion of aid and, with that, the extra military equipment that they are providing. Can the Minister outline what the additional £1 billion of that £1.3 billion is to be spent on, and can she give any further detail about the inquiry into UK components ending up in Russian weapons?

In the light of the war in Ukraine and the provision of this military equipment, have the Government reconsidered any of their existing defence plans? Surely it is now time for a rethink on, for example, cuts to the number of soldiers—something that the head of the Army himself said only this week when he said that the British Army is too small.

Baroness Goldie (Con): I thank the noble Lord. I indicated in the Statement some of the equipment that is going out; I understand that this will include UAV systems to provide logistical support to isolated forces and that new, specialised Toyota Land Cruisers will be

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

going out. I offer to write to the noble Lord with a more specific list of information. In relation to the use of equipment, we supply it to Ukraine and it is for the Ukrainian armed forces to then determine how they deploy and use it. However, our supply of that equipment is to enable Ukraine to defend itself.

On the size of the military, I refer the noble Lord to the integrated review, the comprehensive spending review and, importantly, *Future Soldier*, which detailed how we envisage the shape of the military in forthcoming years and was signed off at the highest levels in the MoD. It is interesting to reflect on how the conflict in Ukraine has unfolded. It has been clear that the might of Russia in terms of numbers of soldiers has actually been of questionable effect when, in Ukraine, an ably trained, very professional, well-equipped force, armed with intelligence, has been able to be very effective in its defence. These are complicated matters but it is perfectly clear that mere numbers are not sufficient.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, these Benches also support the action that the Government have taken so far and regret the size of the army and wish that it could be increased—although we may regret the bidding war that sometimes seems to go on between the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence, which seems to be slightly more about domestic than international politics. Can the Minister tell the House whether the medical equipment and other supplies that are being sent to Ukraine are being adequately replaced so that we can ensure security of supply at this end? Will she be able to make a Statement at some point on the security arrangements which the Prime Minister has just agreed with Sweden?

Baroness Goldie (Con): As the noble Baroness will be aware, extensive supplies of medical equipment have been dispatched and I understand that these are proving of huge support and assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces. As to what is currently in the system and what is still to come, I have no detail before me but I undertake to write to the noble Baroness with more specific information.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, this is going to be a long haul. Is not one of the best immediate ways of helping Ukraine to cut off the billions that are still flowing into the Russian exchequer to help Putin finance child murder in the Ukraine area, and is not the quickest way to do that to find other sources for the millions of barrels of oil a day and to increase gas, which would immediately reduce prices and undermine the Russian position? Are we, as a coalition, making real efforts to press the producers who have available flowing capacity to do that, because clearly the EU is divided and the UN is paralysed, for reasons that we well know?

Baroness Goldie (Con): I do not in any way diminish the importance of my noble friend's question. It is somewhat wide of my responsibilities but I am certain that the matters to which he refers, some of which have already been addressed not just by the United Kingdom Government but by the EU and other global

partners, are certainly having some effect on the Russian economy. As for the more specific matters to which he refers, these are matters for consideration by the Government as a whole. However, in the daily consideration of the situation in Ukraine, every option continues to be looked at, and I am sure that my noble friend's words will resonate.

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, Churchill famously said in his Fulton, Missouri speech that the thing that the Russians despise more than anything else, as he learned in the Second World War, is weakness. As we speak, we are reducing the size of our Army and cutting the numbers of our ships and aircraft. Does that sound to my noble friend like strength or weakness?

Baroness Goldie (Con): As I have indicated to the Chamber before, in the light of the settlement that was made for defence and which was examined in detail under the comprehensive spending review, defence has enjoyed an extent of resource which has been unknown for many years. As my noble friend will be aware, there is a very ambitious shipbuilding project under way for naval craft, not least Type 26s and Type 31s and the other embryonic versions of more sophisticated destroyers and frigates. We are in a good place. As I have said before, there will be differing views of what constitutes an effective military in future warfare. As was clear from *Future Soldier*, all the evidence shows exactly what the shape of that needs to be. Quite simply, with technology we can do a lot more with fewer people.

Lord Hylton (CB): My Lords, do the Government agree that Russia is breaking international law by blocking the export of Ukrainian food across the Black Sea? Will they seek agreement on how to make such exports possible?

Baroness Goldie (Con): I have noted the noble Lord's observations. These are matters which fall under the responsibility of my colleagues in government, but I am sure that his comments will be noted.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD): When we make available equipment of the kind described by the Minister, do we continue to offer training in the use of that equipment?

Baroness Goldie (Con): I reassure the noble Lord that we have offered training to ensure that, when they get the equipment, the Ukrainian armed forces can use it effectively. We are all aware of how effective that response has been and its impact.

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): Are the Government confident that the supply of western military equipment, which is so desperately needed by the Ukrainians, is getting through, given the recent Russian activity in bombing supply lines such as railways?

Baroness Goldie (Con): The noble Lord will understand that, for reasons of operational security, I cannot comment in detail on supply routes, but we are satisfied that the supplies are reaching the Ukrainian armed forces.

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Con): My Lords, Russia wants to cut Ukraine off from the Black Sea. If it is successful, it will be disastrous for the West in areas such as food security but, to do so, it needs a strong Black Sea fleet. Having suffered recent losses, it is unable to reinforce its Black Sea fleet because of the Montreux convention, which limits military movement into the Black Sea. I simply ask my noble friend what reassurances the UK has had from Turkey, which is effectively the custodian of the Montreux convention, that Russia will not be allowed to reinforce its Black Sea fleet.

Baroness Goldie (Con): We routinely engage with Turkey on regional matters, at all levels. Recent engagements have included the Montreux convention and vessel movements through the Bosphorus strait during the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB): Given the risks of escalation in the military elements of the conflict in Ukraine, it is quite clear that any further military aid will have to be less than decisive. In policy terms, therefore, is a prolonged and mutually self-hurting stalemate between Ukraine and Russia probably the best that can be achieved in the current circumstances?

Baroness Goldie (Con): My honourable friend in the other place used the adjective “attritional” to describe the conflict. That is probably pretty accurate. We are very clear about the magnitude of what the Ukrainian armed forces are contending with. Our role, along with that of other NATO partners and other global allies such as the United States and the EU, is to support the Ukrainian armed forces in their endeavour. I am afraid this will not be resolved in the near future. It is important that, as a country, we do everything with our allies to support what is right and to ensure that Ukraine is assisted in seeing off what is wrong.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, is the noble Baroness seriously saying that, in the light of current experience in Ukraine, there is to be no fundamental review of our defence capacity?

Baroness Goldie (Con): We always keep our capacity under review. The integrated review, with the comprehensive spending review, have laid out the strategic direction for defence in this country. We constantly review threat and commitment, and constantly assess what we require to discharge that role. That is kept under constant surveillance.

Jim Fitton: Detention in Iraq *Commons Urgent Question*

3.22 pm

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat the Answer to an Urgent Question in the other place from my right honourable friend the Minister of State for Europe and North America:

“I thank the honourable Lady for raising this important case. I recognise that this is a very distressing time for Mr Fitton and his family. I would also like to reassure honourable Members that consular officials continue to maintain contact with Mr Fitton and his family—indeed, they met his family this morning—and we liaise with his lawyers to provide consular assistance. Since his arrest in March, consular officials have visited Mr Fitton on four occasions.

We understand the urgency and the concerns that Mr Fitton and his family have. We cannot, of course, interfere or seek to interfere with the judicial process of another country, just as we would not expect interference in our own judicial process. That said, the British ambassador in Baghdad has raised and will continue to raise Mr Fitton’s case with the Iraqi Government. That includes raising with the authorities the UK’s strong opposition to the death penalty, in the context of both its potential application to Mr Fitton and our in-principle opposition to it in all instances.”

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for repeating that Statement. Jim Fitton was arrested and detained simply for picking up unguarded shards of broken pottery and stones at a historical site, after being assured that they had no value. It could happen to any tourist travelling in a country of significant historical interest. In the House of Commons, the Minister said that the Government were engaging with officials in Iraq over the incident, but can the noble Lord confirm whether this is at a high level, between Minister and Minister? If it is not, do the Government have any plans for the Foreign Secretary to intervene personally?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I can confirm that high-level conversations are going on between the FCDO and the ambassador in Iraq. The ambassador has raised the case with the Iraqi authorities on four occasions, including by sending a note verbale. As regards ministerial engagement, my right honourable friend the Minister of State for Asia and the Middle East, Amanda Milling, has been kept very much up to date on Mr Fitton’s situation. Officials have lobbied at a high level in Iraq and will continue to consider what lobbying is most effective.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, this is a worrying case, not least because under Iraqi law it is a capital crime. I am glad that the Minister has conveyed to the House that representations have been made about the death penalty, but Ministers have refused to engage with my colleague Wera Hobhouse MP, who represents Mr Fitton. On 27 April I wrote to the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, in his capacity as Human Rights Minister, about the death sentence for this British citizen. I have yet to receive a reply, which is of significant concern given the urgency of this case. I know that the Minister engages with the Front Benches in this House. Will he please meet me and Wera Hobhouse, who represents Mr Fitton? The trial is days away and ministerial representations for the elected representative of Mr Fitton are highly appropriate.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I thank the noble Lord for that. Of course I will be delighted to meet him. I should say that my noble friend Lord Ahmad would be here, but he has Covid, as the noble Lord probably knows.

Queen's Speech *Debate (2nd Day)*

3.26 pm

*Moved on Tuesday 10 May by Lord Sherbourne
of Didsbury*

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

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

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton): My Lords, on behalf of your Lordships’ House, I thank His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales for delivering the gracious Speech, and I am grateful for the privilege of opening today’s debate on the Motion for an humble Address.

Today, I shall outline the Government’s plans for a world-class transport network and our plans to spread opportunity across our country by using landmark legislation to level up jobs, homes and high streets. My noble friend Lord Greenhalgh will close what I am sure will be a lively debate, full of important contributions from all sides of this House. I am particularly looking forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford.

Even before Covid-19 disrupted lives and livelihoods, the Government made it clear that the economic divides which exist across the country have persisted for too long and that while talent is universal, opportunity is not. Levelling up means changing this once and for all so that we can meet these challenges head on and achieve greater prosperity and connectivity after the pandemic. Only by building on the unique strengths of every city, town and village in the UK can we grow our economy and address the cost of living, and few things transform the prospects of an individual, a community and, indeed, an entire nation more than a modern, well-functioning transport network. Transport gives people the opportunity and means to get on and access jobs, education and training. Transport investment can be the spark which regenerates entire regions, attracting businesses and boosting housing development across the country, and given that transport is the biggest source of our domestic greenhouse gas emissions, the entire sector will play a crucial role in achieving our 2050 net-zero target.

The Government were elected on a reforming platform and our proposed legislation is bold and ambitious. Our transport Bill will deliver new, modern and more sustainable railways fit for the country that created them. Despite the enormous benefits of privatisation which saw the doubling of passenger numbers and the quadrupling of government investment, it has long

been clear that major, industry-wide change is needed. This Bill will give us the powers to deliver the Williams-Shapps plan for rail, the biggest reform to our railways in a generation. It will create Great British Railways—GBR—a single national leader and the new guiding mind for the railways, which will contract private operators to run train services for passengers. GBR will drive efficiencies and economies of scale, while arresting the spiralling costs associated with the current model. The Bill will allow GBR to replace franchising with new passenger service contracts, which will free up and incentivise operators to focus on improving the passenger experience and delivering reliable services.

Importantly, the transport Bill will not only improve the railway journeys of today but pave the way for the travel choices of tomorrow. Take electric vehicles, or EVs. The number of EVs sold in April was 40% higher than in the same month last year. EVs are often cheaper to own, run and maintain than their petrol and diesel equivalents, which can save drivers hundreds of pounds a year. They are also our best bet to help reduce the source of around 20% of domestic emissions.

But the success of this transition will depend on the rollout of charging infrastructure. The Bill will help achieve the aims of our recently launched EV infrastructure strategy. It will ensure that local authorities not only plan and deliver EV charging strategies but address private charging for those living in multioccupancy buildings.

Another emerging trend is automation. The Bill will place the UK at the forefront of self-driving vehicle safety. It is a market set to be worth nearly £42 billion by 2035, creating 38,000 skilled jobs. But this is possible only through comprehensive legislation, which will enable the Government to set new safety standards and assign legal responsibilities to protect users of self-driving vehicles, as well as those on the streets around them.

We will establish new legal entities to take responsibility for vehicles that drive themselves. In the event of any issues, this will prevent the occupants of the vehicles being unfairly held to account. The legislation will also ensure that the vehicles remain safe throughout their lives, and that they serve all parts of society when used in public transport networks.

Technology has also led to changes in how the taxi and private hire vehicle industry works—for example, through booking apps available on mobile phones. We will modernise the law to ensure that the same minimum standards are met by drivers across England to gain or retain a taxi or private hire vehicle licence, and we will enhance licensing authorities’ existing compliance and enforcement powers. These changes will create a level playing field and make journeys safer for all passengers.

Safety is also at the heart of our plans to create a regulatory framework for smaller, lighter, zero-emission vehicles, sometimes known as e-scooters. Their popularity is clear, and new rules are needed to improve safety and crack down on illegal use while unlocking innovation and growth in this emerging multi-billion pound industry. To that end, it is our intention that the Bill will create a low-speed, zero-emission vehicle category that is independent from the cycle and motor vehicle categories.

New powers would allow the Government to decide the vehicles that fall into this new category in future and how they should be regulated to make sure that they are safe to use. We hope that e-scooters will be the first of these vehicles.

The areas of the transport Bill that I have highlighted only scratch the surface. Our Bill will go far beyond road and rail; it will cover important proposals for maritime and aviation too.

All noble Lords will be aware of the recent shocking actions of P&O Ferries in sacking 800 of its workers without notice or consultation, via a Zoom call. The Secretary of State for Transport pledged to bring in new legislation to close the loopholes that P&O Ferries exploited and ensure that seafarers earn a fair wage. The harbours (seafarers' remuneration) Bill will give UK ports new powers to make it a condition of entry for ferry services to pay the equivalent of the national minimum wage to seafarers while in UK waters. That includes surcharging operators that cannot prove that they pay such a wage and ultimately suspending them from access to the port.

The Bill will also require ferry operators to have access to all relevant details of employment terms, even if they do not employ the crew directly. For too long, workers at sea have lacked the benefits and rights of those working on land. This legislation will finally put that right.

Transport is just one way of reducing inequality and narrowing economic divides. Levelling up requires a government-wide mobilisation to refocus on the communities and people left behind for too long, and to lift all underperforming areas closer to the UK average. We can now set out exactly how we will deliver on this defining pledge.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will enshrine into law the 12 levelling-up missions, covering themes such as pay and productivity, eradicating child illiteracy and innumeracy, and getting more people into skills training. We will allocate billions of pounds of investment via our shared prosperity, levelling-up and towns funds to improve local services, support high streets and upgrade local transport. Through this Bill, we will lay the foundations for all of England to have the opportunity to benefit from a devolution deal by 2030, giving local leaders the powers they need to drive real improvement in their local communities. We will hold our own feet to the fire, with accountability and transparency at the heart of the Bill. It will introduce a duty on government to report on the progress of these missions every year until 2030.

We will also provide a much-needed shot in the arm for the millions of people who are living in damp, cold and dangerous rented homes. They deserve a much fairer deal, and our renters reform Bill will, for the first time, apply the decent homes standard to privately rented homes to require landlords to ensure the homes they rent out are fit for purpose. It will also go further, by giving tenants the security needed to raise a family and plan their life without the looming threat of unfair no-fault Section 21 evictions.

It will not surprise your Lordships' House that our social housing sector is in urgent need of reform as well. The introduction of the social housing regulation Bill could not be more timely. Social tenants deserve a

better settlement, and the Government are committed to giving it to them, with an overhaul to tip the balance in their favour. Through the Bill, we will introduce new, stronger regulations that deliver the kind of consumer regulatory regime which can increase the quality and safety of homes. The Bill will also prioritise transparency so that social housing landlords can be properly held to account by the Regulator of Social Housing and by tenants who have, for too long, had their complaints ignored. The social housing regulation Bill is a key part of our plan to level up housing across the country and deliver for tenants by halving the number of non-decent rented homes by 2030.

In addition, the Government are committed to reviewing and simplifying the business rates system in the country. The non-domestic rating Bill will deliver that and help businesses and employees grow their productivity by making improvements to their places of work.

We will also deliver another manifesto commitment of this Government: to stop public bodies adopting their own approach to international relations through the foreign affairs (economic activity of publicly funded bodies) Bill. This Bill does exactly what it says on the tin, preventing public bodies pursuing boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries or territories, with the obvious caveat being when these campaigns align with UK Government foreign policy. Ukraine has made clearer than ever the need to present a united front when it comes to foreign policy, so through this Bill we will prevent that being undermined by independent foreign policies sponsored by taxpayers' money.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): Can the Minister indicate whether that will apply to the Scottish Government?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): I am probably not going to be drawn into that matter right at this moment, but I am sure that my noble friend Lord Greenhalgh has taken that comment to heart—and the buck has been passed. My noble friend will get back to the noble Lord.

The legislation we have set out will allow us to build a world-class transport system that delivers, day in, day out, for passengers while supporting our wider economic recovery. It also fundamentally reorientates the whole of government's focus on those communities and places that for too long have been left behind to give people the economic and political tools to improve the places in which they live, to build a fairer country and to ensure that all parts of the UK can fire on all cylinders.

3.39 pm

Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab): My Lords, I declare my interest as a vice-president of the LGA and add that I am also very much looking forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford.

This Government were elected on a promise to level up Britain. However, on the basis of this gracious Speech they will continue to fall short of the ambition needed to deliver for our towns, cities and villages

[BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS]

across the country. People across the United Kingdom, wherever they live, deserve new opportunities, the power to determine the future of their own area, and local services which grow and thrive. That can be delivered only with a transformative and transparent new economic settlement, not just more tinkering around the edges.

Transport is absolutely central to this. However, under this Government, people are being priced out of driving, public transport and even active travel. This is a tired and indecisive Government who have run out of ideas and are producing endless reports instead of getting on with delivering real change. While I am glad the Government have now finally announced a transport Bill, the reports so far suggest that it will fall short of the reforms we need to ensure that our transport networks across all modes of transport work for the people and communities which rely on them.

The silence on buses is deeply troubling for those many thousands of people and their communities which rely on bus services as their lifeline to access work, training, healthcare and loved ones. I hope the Minister can confirm whether the transport Bill will include any provisions on the reform of bus services, including further devolution of powers to ensure that bus networks work for the people who rely on them. I also ask the Minister for an update on the work analysing the long-term impact of Covid-19 on all our services.

On the issue of railways, I look forward to line-by-line scrutiny of the long-awaited proposals for the new Great British Railways body, particularly on how proposals will put the passenger back at the heart of decision-making and service delivery. I am afraid that none of the proposals can make up for the broken promises on building new railways. Ministers are scrapping not only plans for a new line between Manchester and Leeds via Bradford, but also the HS2 eastern leg. We remain committed to delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 East in full. The Government are now offering people in our regions watered-down half-baked plans and the absolute bare minimum.

This brings me to the HS2 Bill in the Queen's Speech to enable the building of the section between Crewe and Manchester. While we fully support this, it is shameful that the Government are not also able to legislate for the eastern leg. None the less, we will seek to ensure that the legislation includes provisions for the consultation and engagement of local residents along the new line, as well as exploring options to encourage Ministers to revive the eastern leg. Can the Minister give detailed analysis of the impact that the delay to the eastern leg is having on, for example, value for money, project spend and the procurement process, with particular reference to the potentially lost opportunity to create tens of thousands of jobs, including highly skilled jobs, all along the routes, as well as crucial support for local industry? Please can we also have an answer on when the Leeds plan will be available? This is urgent, and it will be vital for regeneration schemes right across Yorkshire.

I return to the transport Bill. The provisions to allow more electric vehicle charging points are welcome, but the Government will need far more ambition if

they are to help to transition the country to cleaner driving, delivering on our climate commitments and cleaner air quality. That is why Labour has recently begun to set out how our government would work in partnership with business, trade unions and other stakeholders on a long-term industrial strategy, with our plans to make the UK a leader in electric vehicle manufacturing.

The Bill should also be used to better regulate new forms of transport. Although I am pleased that it will include clauses on pedicabs, there should also be provisions on e-scooters. The Minister will recall that several Members of this House have previously raised safety concerns over their use and, although we can all see that e-scooters can play a valuable role in the future of short-distance travel, too many of them on the streets of the UK are unnecessarily dangerous in their current form. Safety should be paramount, as the Minister stated.

Turning to other transport legislation in the gracious Speech, I look forward to the harbours (seafarers' remuneration) Bill. In the aftermath of the P&O scandal, the Government must close the loopholes that have meant that seafarers have been mistreated at UK harbours. But I hope that, in the development of this legislation, the Minister can confirm that the Government will work with trade unions to ensure that the concerns of seafarers are addressed at every stage of the process.

Needless to say, we will also seek to amend broader legislation regarding levelling up and housing Bills with reference to communities—not least the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. I am pleased that my noble friend Lady Hayman will pick up some aspects of that later in the debate. At first glance, the 388 pages of the Bill lack any substance or ambition, and the review of their 12 missions amounts to little more than the Government marking their own homework. We need detailed evidence that, through more devolved powers, local communities, led by their local authorities, can do the necessary work to link skills, housing, employment and transport needs, for example, to realise their ambition. Will we finally see reforms to the shameful competitive bidding process that has disadvantaged so many communities in real need of investment? I am afraid that the approach to levelling up that we are seeing still lacks new money and new ideas.

On housing, the social housing regulation Bill will be a welcome contribution to making homes safer and more secure, but should be coupled with ensuring that tenants are really heard and listened to and that they finally have effective means of redress. Meanwhile, the renters reform Bill will be very welcome, but, following delay after delay, and now talk of another White Paper, I hope that the Government will make sure that the ban on no-fault evictions is brought forward swiftly.

Half way through this Parliament, the Government are still failing to match the ambitions that people have for their communities. The gracious Speech should have been a chance to change that, but instead there is yet more rearranging of the deckchairs. I look forward to Ministers bringing forward the Bills referred to in the Queen's Speech, and I equally look forward to working with the House to amend them and, therefore, improve them substantially.

3.50 pm

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, I, too, should remind the House that I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association and I, too, look forward to hearing the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford.

The context of this humble Address is important. We have a growing cost of living crisis, with 10% inflation forecast by the autumn. We have rising house prices, putting home ownership out of reach of yet more people; we have 8 million households facing fuel poverty; and we have the tax burden at its highest level since 1945. Bus services are being cut; 10% of young people are not in education, employment or training; and cuts to council budgets over recent years have led to a serious deterioration in local public services. I would have expected far more in the humble Address about the Government's plans to address that crisis. Simply saying that the Government are going to turbocharge the economy is not enough. Unless the Government are prepared to devolve real power to councils and combined authorities, as the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, pointed out, it will carry on failing to address the very substantial problems that our economy faces.

First, I shall make some remarks on transport. I was very pleased to hear from the Minister that the Government are planning a world-class transport system. I wonder whether she might inform us whether that includes the eastern leg of HS2 and HS3, which only a few months ago the Government decided not to proceed with. Nevertheless, there are some important initiatives to be proposed, particularly around electric vehicles and e-scooters, and we look forward very much to looking at the detail of those Bills in due course. I also welcome the plan for Great British Railways: a single strategic structure for our railway system. That has to be right—but will it be able to improve services, especially as short-term cuts are planned in many places because of the downturn in commuter markets? Given the provisions of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, what are the opportunities for that new body to work positively with combined authorities and counties to help them to deliver good-value services?

I hope that the legislation will include further powers of devolution for local and regional rail services, so that more passengers and places can benefit from the kind of transformation that occurred on Merseyrail and London Overground, following the transfer of control to Merseytravel and TfL respectively.

On buses, there is a structural weakness in the bus market, partly but not entirely because of Covid, leading to severe cuts in some places. From October onwards, there will be no further government support for buses. Although the Government are providing new funding to some areas, that funding is to pay for improvements and new services, not to underpin existing ones. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask what the Government's plan is to maintain a basic level of public transport provision across the country to help deliver levelling up. What are the plans for the 45 areas in England which got no money to improve local bus services? Only 34 out of 79 did—and some, such as South Yorkshire and Liverpool City Region, are very substantial areas of our country.

I continue to regret that the word “housing” does not appear in the department's name, but I welcome the renters reform and social housing regulation Bills. It is right to abolish no-fault evictions; the Government promised that in their 2019 manifesto and, until Section 21 is repealed, renting families will live in fear that requests for repairs could be met with an eviction. I welcome, too, proposals to strengthen the role of the Housing Ombudsman and the regulator in the social housing regulation Bill.

But there is a missed opportunity to do something about social housing for rent. There is no mention of the need for this in the Queen's Speech and we need far more. It is the context of these Bills the Government are proposing that should worry us. Average house prices are now £360,000—up £19,000 in the last two months. Owner occupation for the under-35s has dropped over the past 30 years from 70% to just 40%. Not enough new homes are being built—the Government know this—and more people are being forced into the private rented sector, which has almost doubled in size in the past decade. Rents are rising very quickly now because of rising demand, and local housing allowance surely needs to be increased. How much better it would be if the Government built more social homes to reduce spending on housing benefits. Only 5% of the council homes sold under right to buy have been replaced, and yet 1.2 million households—4.2 million people—currently need social housing in England and do not have it.

I welcome the concept of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and look forward to examining the detail. It is important and welcome to empower local leaders to regenerate their areas, but it takes time and substantial private sector commitment to places which are left behind. I welcome the proposed levy to replace Section 106 and the community infrastructure levy, and the fact that the new levy will be set locally and will be non-negotiable. I think that is good to see. It is helpful; it should deliver some extra resources to local authorities for their share in the costs of levelling up.

As the Secretary of State said on 9 February in a speech in Liverpool to the Convention of the North:

“We simply can't go on with the gulf between rich and poor ... growing.”

He is right. But more recently, a few days ago, he said that rising prices were making the Government's plans to reduce regional inequalities more difficult and more important. That is also, I guess, true. I say to the Minister that you do not level up places without levelling up people first. You have to have the education, further education and apprenticeship systems in place to help level up people. You do not level up by increasing taxation and reducing disposable incomes, as the Government have done.

The Government have committed that in eight years, by 2030, they will deliver levelling up across the 12 missions they announced in February. One solution to this problem that the Government have committed themselves to solving would be to devolve far more power than they seem to want to do. You cannot run England out of Whitehall. Problems need owning and solving at a regional and sub-regional level, and delivering 12 missions for levelling up, right across several Whitehall departments, sounds like mission impossible to me.

[LORD SHIPLEY]

As an example of the problem—there are many examples—in the first round of the levelling-up fund £1.7 billion was allocated to towns and cities across the UK. When “Panorama” recently sent freedom of information requests to 100 councils representing the most deprived areas in England, it found that 28 councils had all their bids rejected. This included 18 areas that were on the Government’s top priority list, including Knowsley and Blackpool. Meanwhile, 38 councils won all or some of the money they requested. So I ask the Minister: what help is Whitehall going to give to those towns it rejects? Can I ask the Minister, very specifically, why the Government refuse to give those applications they reject written feedback, preferring to give them only verbal feedback when bids have been turned down? It seems to me that the Government should be giving something in writing to those they say are not submitting adequately good bids. I agree entirely with the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, that competition between local authorities these days is unhelpful, given the overall objective of levelling up. Anyway, what criteria are Whitehall departments actually using?

In conclusion, I now wish that we had the regional development agencies, although there were problems with them. It seems, from my reading, that, as part of the Government’s current planning, combined authorities will have some responsibility for transport and spatial planning. However, I also read that where devolved powers are going to counties, they will not have responsibilities for transport or spatial planning. So the question is: who has those powers? I think we know the answer. I hope, and I say this earnestly to the Minister, that when we get the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill from the other place we will have the time to examine this in detail. I fear that, unless we get this right, by 2030 not very much will have happened in the levelling-up agenda.

4 pm

Lord Kakkar (CB): My Lords, I thank the Minister for the thoughtful way in which she has introduced this particular day of debate on the humble Address and, in so doing, declare my own interests as chairman of the King’s Fund and of the Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research.

Her Majesty’s Government’s commitment to levelling up and the introduction of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill is, of course, broadly welcome, but there can be no more important manifestation of the inequalities that exist between different regions of the country and between different communities and populations than the inequalities in health outcomes that have so plagued the successful delivery of our National Health Service. Indeed, in the last Session of Parliament, Her Majesty’s Government introduced a new health Bill, which has now received Royal Assent, with the determination that there may be greater emphasis on local co-ordination for the delivery of healthcare. However, that emphasis has been principally on matters of health, of course, and engaging with local government, but not really providing sufficient definition with regard to how the most important determinants that drive inequalities in health outcomes—the social determinants of health—might be most appropriately addressed.

Those are matters that fall outside the traditional delivery of healthcare and are questions that pertain to local communities and the delivery of local government, such as the provision of employment, housing and education, as three important examples.

So, in coming to consider the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, it is important for Her Majesty’s Government to ask themselves whether, in moving this important piece of legislation, they are doing everything they can to provide maximum opportunity to focus on health questions. These are vitally important for the local communities the Government are so determined to support and encourage. It is well recognised now that the difference in life span between the wealthiest and poorest communities in our country is some seven years, but, more shocking, the difference in healthy life expectancy—that life period without ill health—is 17 years, with the poorest communities having far more chronic ill health and dying earlier.

How might attention to the provision of healthcare and investment in local communities address this question? That is clear when it comes to investment in the health service, but beyond that there is the capacity to look at, for instance, the regeneration of the high street, which the noble Baroness mentioned, and to ask whether there might be imaginative ways, and indeed ways facilitated through legislation, to ensure that healthcare facilities are provided increasingly in the high street: that is, using real estate that has been previously neglected and abandoned for the provision of community-directed healthcare facilities or of ambulatory healthcare facilities—facilities that are closer to the populations, particularly those who live in inner cities and central to towns, who tend to have much more chronic ill health and would therefore be able to avail themselves more easily of those facilities. In investing in that fashion, one provides not only the opportunity for improved access to healthcare but the opportunity for regeneration, broadly, of the high street, with much more activity and therefore much of what has to be provided in out-of-town hospital facilities being present in the high street.

Beyond the opportunity to drive regeneration through investment in healthcare facilities, there is the important question of undertaking population health research in communities to understand their true needs and therefore to respond with interventions that will have the greatest impact on improving local health outcomes. In this regard, there is a greater need for local government and local authorities to participate in the health research agenda, something that does not happen effectively at the moment. This is an area where encouragement from government for cross-departmental engagement on these matters, beyond the Department of Health and Social Care, is critical.

Finally, there is the question of how investment in healthcare locally can drive the development of excellent employment opportunities. If provision is made for the training of local populations to participate in the health and care workforce, those populations should continue to be developed and encouraged over the duration of their professional careers. This would not only deal with important needs in local communities, but the upskilling of a population devoted to health and care, and ultimately the attraction of further investment and engagement with universities and other

educational institutions, would provide the opportunity for broader investment in the life sciences ecosystem that will usually attend communities and institutions delivering high-quality healthcare.

This is an important opportunity for Her Majesty's Government when considering the broader question of levelling up. It is not usually discussed as an element of the levelling-up agenda, but failing to use this important opportunity to bring together local government, to facilitate—indeed, to mandate—a focus on addressing social determinants of health, and to ensure that the planning system can provide the opportunity to create meaningful, local and locally focused healthcare facilities, would be critical.

In closing this part of the debate, I wonder whether the Minister might reflect on how Her Majesty's Government can use their levelling-up agenda to address these issues.

4.08 pm

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: My Lords, it is a privilege to share in this debate, and I thank the Minister for her careful and thoughtful introduction. I particularly look forward to the maiden speech of my colleague, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. I have heard him speak before, and it is always a profitable experience.

I congratulate the Government warmly on the priority given to the levelling-up agenda and the ambition of 11 of the 12 missions outlined in the White Paper. I know from my seven years as Bishop of Sheffield that the gap between different parts of the country has been widening for many years, and it is very good that this is being addressed.

However, I believe that there is a missing, or misnamed, mission, which is a fundamental flaw in these proposals. It is right to look to increase public investment, jobs and digital connectivity, and to focus on education, health, skills, well-being and the rest, but there is scarcely a mention of the environment, climate change and climate mitigation in the levelling-up White Paper. Surely all our citizens have a right to expect clean air free of particulates, clean water, and good access to nature. They have a right to new homes that are well built and well insulated. Everyone should expect that national and local government will lead on reducing CO₂ emissions, recycling, public engagement on these issues, and mitigation of the damage caused by extreme weather now and in the future. Instead of an ambitious mission on environment and climate, the White Paper settles for the much weaker concept of pride of place, which I believe needs to be challenged. I want to ask for change here.

Local government at every level has a key role in addressing the climate and environment emergency. A few weeks ago, it was a privilege to interview Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo, along with other members of your Lordships' Environment and Climate Change Committee. I was deeply impressed by the steps Tokyo is taking towards behaviour change to net zero. The example of Tokyo and many towns and cities in the UK demonstrates that local government is an essential partner in improving the environment and can engage local populations sometimes even more effectively than national government. Local government needs to be

supported to take full advantage of the potential of the green economy and green jobs, and every policy decision needs to be consistent with the net-zero goals and reflect the latest understanding of climate risks. In this respect, the levelling-up Bill needs to be future-proofed for this decade.

One of my key learnings from our committee's current inquiry into behaviour change is that such change must be led through positive vision, good public engagement, such as through climate change assemblies, and supportive policies to ensure that change goes with the grain of what it means to lead a good life in a positive environment. For this to happen, the UK Government must demonstrate leadership and joined-up thinking, and every policy in every department must be aligned with the net-zero and environmental goals.

As the gracious Speech indicates, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will be a major piece of legislation in this Session. So I ask the Minister: will the department commit to further reflection on the White Paper and the Bill, and on taking the opportunity to set high environmental and climate standards for the Bill, replacing the concept of pride of place with a full-throttle commitment to creating a safe and sustainable environment for the flourishing of all?

4.12 pm

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, it is a great privilege to participate in this debate on the gracious Speech. I congratulate my noble friend on the way in which she introduced it. I feel I should start by offering an apology, because I am going to concentrate on a transport matter which is very niche; my noble friend will not be surprised when I say that it is pedicabs. I promise that, in doing so, I am going to make a bigger point about why they are important to the Government's legislative programme and levelling-up agenda.

Pedicabs have already had a mention today, but it is important to explain that, because of some quirk of arcane legislation and case law, for nearly 20 years they have been the only form of public transport in London that is legal yet completely unregulated. The vehicles and their drivers are not subject to any kinds of check, and they do not need insurance. They can charge passengers whatever they want and many of them do, ripping off tourists and giving London a bad name at the same time. Yet they can ply for hire quite legally, in direct competition with our heavily regulated black cabs, on any street or place in Greater London. At the same time, they are exempt from the kind of traffic restrictions which other drivers in London increasingly face. Knowing that they can act with impunity, many of them do and they are responsible for a massive amount of disruption and anti-social behaviour in some of the capital's tourist hot spots.

Therefore, not surprisingly, Westminster's residents, business owners and the thousands of tradespeople who navigate our congested streets to do an honest day or night's work are fed up. However, now they finally have reason to rejoice because, just before the end of the last Session, Grant Shapps announced to the Transport Select Committee in the other place that the Government would legislate in this Session to deal with, in his words,

"the wild west of pedicabs".

[BARONESS STOWELL OF BEESTON]

I should add that this came after Nickie Aiken, the fantastic local MP, had been thwarted by another MP on four separate occasions when trying to bring forward her Private Member's Bill in the last Session.

In the great scheme of things, this advance—this breakthrough—might seem like a small thing to noble Lords, but it matters: not just as an improvement to public transport provision in the capital but because it too will level up in a way that should have happened years ago. It is important for us to keep in mind all the time that levelling up is not all about massive infrastructure projects or even regional differences. It is also about tackling unfairness experienced by people who feel ignored and taken for granted when they try to do the right thing, and who watch us sit back and let people get away with doing wrong. I have been going on about this for several years via speeches and PQs in your Lordships' House, so today I want to congratulate the Minister. I think I heard her say—but I would just like her to confirm—that the necessary measures to regulate pedicabs will be included in the transport Bill. I am looking at my noble friend now, and she is not shaking her head, which is rather worrying. I hope, therefore, that my noble friend Lord Greenhalgh will be able to confirm that later.

When it comes to delivering the levelling-up agenda, I urge the Government to seek out more examples of basic unfairness that could be rectified relatively simply and swiftly with a bit of effort. It is worth remembering that small things matter when they make a big difference to people's lives; good people doing the right thing are understandably intolerant when our effort is all about facilitating the new. In the point I am making, I include the use of e-scooters: when we ignore the people who use them without consideration and responsibility to everyone else.

With the indulgence of the House, I also want to make some brief points about the DCMS legislation announced in yesterday's gracious Speech. I do not expect my noble friend Lord Greenhalgh to respond to these points today, but I will send my remarks to my noble friend Lord Parkinson in the hope he will respond to them tomorrow. I should declare that I chair the Communications and Digital Select Committee of your Lordships' House. Much of the Government's legislative agenda for this Session that falls within my committee's remit has already been the subject of previous or ongoing scrutiny.

For example, the committee's inquiry into the privatisation of Channel 4 last year emphasised the need for a clear vision for the future public broadcasting landscape. It concluded with no objection in principle to the privatisation of Channel 4, subject to it remaining a public service broadcaster and the conditions of its current remit not being diluted in the contract conditions of any sale. That said, the committee questioned the urgency of such a move; whereas something that my committee does consider urgent is the new pro-competition regime for digital markets.

Internet regulation is not only about the Online Safety Bill; tackling anti-competitive practices from tech titans is just as important. Indeed, competition legislation is the other side of the same coin, without the risks to freedom of speech. We cannot unleash the

full potential of UK start-ups if the entrenched market power of those tech giants creates barriers to entry for entrepreneurs and stifles innovation. The committee, therefore, enthusiastically welcomes the Government's proposals for the Digital Markets Unit, which they published last Friday and which they themselves described as urgent. In our view, it is essential that this legislation is brought forward without delay. Delays in tackling abuses have already resulted in significant consequences for UK businesses and consumers.

The Government's commitment in yesterday's Queen's Speech to bring forward only draft legislation is hard to fathom. Since 2019, multiple reviews and consultations by the Government, independent panels and the CMA have recommended these measures. It is hard to argue anything other than that the digital markets, competition and consumer Bill is urgent. My question for my noble friend Lord Parkinson, which I hope he will be able to answer tomorrow, is: when will the Government bring forward legislation?

Meanwhile, today, I reiterate how much I welcome the Government's commitment to legislate so that, once and for all, pedicabs in London will be regulated very soon, bringing an end to the Wild West of the West End.

4.20 pm

Baroness Prosser (Lab): My Lords, I, too, thank the Minister for introducing this debate. When I first came into this House, in 2004, I, along with many other new noble Lords, was advised to have a conversation with the then Clerk of the Parliaments. I cannot remember his name—I am sure there are people here who would—but I recall that he was a very scary person, who was extremely serious about everything. He said to me, "I would suggest you make your maiden speech when it is time to address the Queen's Speech, in the humble Address, because on that occasion, you can talk about what is in the Speech and what is not in the Speech." I thought that was pretty good advice and I am thinking about it today.

I shall speak about what is in the Speech but also what is not, all on the same subject: levelling up. Why is there no mention of levelling up opportunities between women and men? I would go for years and years without ever having heard those on the Government Benches talk about ways in which we can improve life for women. There has never been an idea, and certainly not a major programme, put forward. I suggest that that is foolish for everybody, not least, of course, the women themselves, because the country loses a vast amount of income from not making the best of women's talents.

The Equal Pay Act came in as law in 1970 and was implemented in 1975, not far off 50 years or half a century ago, but we still have a pay gap that is an embarrassment. We do not necessarily need more legislation to deal with that, although upgrading the current equal pay legislation would be good and helpful, but we need determination by leaders in government to introduce policies and programmes that will help.

We have experience of such policies and programmes, which were successful in their time but which were closed down immediately the previous Labour

Government lost the election and in came the coalition. For example, at that time we had a programme working with employers—who were really gung ho for the idea—to encourage them to introduce greater opportunities for better quality part-time jobs. We all know that many women go into employment, make a decent fist of it, work their way along and earn reasonable wages, but as soon as they have children they cannot afford to pay for childcare on the salaries they are receiving, and so they go into part-time work—at that time, of course, it was almost entirely in the retail trade, and even that opportunity is not there at the moment. Better quality part-time jobs provided by employers would be one big help.

Secondly, how about some positive action programmes to train those women who have slid into the kind of employment which does not allow them to earn a great deal of money and is far below their potential? Again, we have experience of those programmes, and, again, they were extremely successful. Employers were really keen and engaged very positively to ensure that women in their employment could take advantage of these programmes and move forward.

There are many reasons why it is important for women to be able to earn more. One of the major setbacks, of course, is the question of the cost of childcare. I smiled to myself—it is a bitter irony, I thought, with all the conversation that has been going on in recent times about levelling up—when I saw that the Government's answer to expensive childcare is to level down. It is a complete and utter insult to the whole population that those people who have insufficient funds to pay a high price must therefore put up with a second-rate service, never mind the effect that this would have on the children in the care of those institutions, such as nurseries, et cetera.

Let us not think about levelling down. Let us think a bit more imaginatively about ways in which childcare could be paid for. Many years ago, in some European countries, the cost was shared between employers, parents and the Government. It was a three-way split, meaning that childcare was affordable to each of those bodies. Why can we not think imaginatively about ways of spreading this expense?

Finally, on the need to ensure that women have a better shout, as well as better opportunities to earn more money so that they can support themselves, all of us in this House—and everyone far and wide, I am sure—abhor the notion of domestic violence. Many women living in coercive, if not violent, relationships have no opportunity to move on, say that they have had enough and go out and find their own way, because they have no money in their pockets. Just a few social policy programmes would help to alleviate this. It is time to move on.

4.27 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I declare my interests as president of the Rural Coalition and a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I, too, welcome Her Majesty's Speech and the Government's commitment to implementing the levelling-up agenda; although, as other noble Lords have, I note the Secretary of State's comments about the difficulties of levelling up in a period of high inflation.

The scope of the Government's 12 levelling-up missions is ambitious, but they now need to be accompanied by a determination to deliver them, which will be costly. Cautious as the Government may be about fulfilling these mission statements, expectations are high among those in left-behind communities, even if, to date, some of the most deprived areas are still not receiving the funding that they had hoped for and expected. The BBC programme has been referenced by others; it was telling when we looked at how the money has so far been allocated.

To strike a more positive note, the initial content that we know will feature in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill with respect to local high streets and empty retail units is welcome. However, notably absent from the White Paper was any mention of delivering prosperity or growth to rural communities, which is what I want to concentrate on for the rest of my speech.

The shared prosperity fund certainly has great potential to help to level up rural Britain by investing in local communities. However, money alone will not close the 18% productivity gap that currently exists between urban and rural locations or achieve the mission statements of the levelling-up agenda. I am thinking particularly of mission 1, to close the productivity gap; mission 2, to increase research and development; and mission 5. There is also a lack of any talk about buses, which are absolutely fundamental in rural areas—anyone working in a rural area knows that they are vital. A comprehensive rural strategy is absolutely essential.

I was pleased by the announcement that legislation will be brought forward to encourage the domestic agricultural and scientific innovation required to unlock the future of sustainable and efficient farming. In my opinion, this has the real potential to revitalise the rural economy and promote our rural localities as scientific hubs at the cutting edge of agricultural experimentation. We have so much to be proud of in this country. We are right at the forefront of some of the most exciting agricultural initiatives, and we do not do enough to showcase these around the world.

However, to turn this ambition into reality, alongside the wider mission statements of the levelling-up programme the Government will have to reverse the brain drain affecting rural areas. If rural localities are to attract the talent required to close the productivity gap and turn themselves into scientific hubs, questions of affordability and connectivity will have to be tackled. Despite rural wages lagging behind their urban counterparts, England is the only OECD country where it is more expensive to live in a rural area.

Poor digital connectivity is an important factor in deciding where people locate and a major impediment to businesses and individuals thriving in our 21st-century rural economy. The fact that the gigabit digital rollout will cover only 85% of the country by 2025 could be a stumbling block to closing that £43 billion productivity gap. Hopefully, the desire on the Government's part to meet their own levelling-up missions will spur them on to expedite the rollout for the remaining 15% by 2030 at a minimum, but hopefully long before.

Rural communities need tailored policies to build more affordable houses that chime with their needs, values and design, along with the creation of well-linked business hubs. I commend to your Lordships' House

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]
the recent report by the APPG for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse on levelling up the rural economy in achieving the twin pillars of connectivity and affordability needed to facilitate a thriving business and innovation environment.

The Government's priorities to strengthen the economy and ease the cost of living for families are the right ones at the right time, but we need them to be bedded into the rural as well as the urban.

4.32 pm

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab): My Lords, while levelling up is a welcome aim of the gracious Speech, the Prime Minister recently admitted to the committee of committee chairs that we cannot level up the country without reducing the number of children living in poverty. When it was pointed out that child poverty is not mentioned once in the levelling-up White Paper, he responded that this was a "purely formal accident". But I fear that it is not an accident at all. Rather, it is symptomatic of how the levelling-up agenda has failed to include any form of anti-poverty strategy, even though, as the Social Mobility Commission pointed out last year, unlike the other nations of the UK, "England has no official poverty or child poverty reduction strategy"—

and none is promised in the gracious Speech. Yet Action for Children identifies a child poverty strategy as key to levelling up for children.

In his letter to Peers on the levelling-up White Paper, the Minister noted that the disparities it promises to tackle are often larger within places than between them. Surely this suggests that levelling up has to address inequalities between people as well as between places—as noted by the noble Lord, Lord Shipley—which includes reducing poverty. The White Paper acknowledges that levelling up

"means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish"—an admirable goal—but there is no recognition of the ways in which poverty stunts the opportunity to flourish of millions of our fellow citizens, or of the role that social security should play in preventing and alleviating poverty.

This has taken on a new urgency with the cost of living crisis. The combination of the withdrawal of the £20 uplift, despite cross-party pressure, and the uprating of benefits by less than half the current inflation rate is pushing low-income households into what the Trussell Trust, which has reported a recent surge in need for emergency food parcels, calls "desperate territory". Just this week, the Food Foundation reported a sharp increase in the proportion of households with children experiencing food insecurity—from around 12% in January to around 17% last month. Today, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research warns that, without an additional boost to universal credit, which it says is affordable, around 250,000 more households could slip into extreme poverty, taking the total to around 1 million.

We are not talking about what the Prime Minister referred to as "feeling the pinch", which is an example of a

"lack of understanding among policy-makers of the scale and severity of the difficulties"

that those on low incomes are facing—to quote a recent Covid Realities report. One participant in this important participatory research commented:

"There is quite simply nothing left to cut back on."

Without a firm commitment to address the intense hardship and even destitution that so many confront, levelling up will appear to them as a cruel joke—as will the Prime Minister's repeated assurances that the Government

"will continue to use all our ingenuity and compassion".—[*Official Report, Commons, 10/5/22; col. 17.*]

What compassion? As a wide range of civil society groups and think tanks have made clear, rather than ingenuity, what is needed is a simple boost to social security benefits.

In its recent *Universal Periodic Review* report, the Equality and Human Rights Commission calls on the Government to "examine the factors", including social security changes, behind the disproportionate risk of poverty faced by

"certain ethnic minorities and children ... and develop strategies to address them."

Will the Government commit to doing this? Can the Minister tell us when we can expect the strategy to tackle the "entrenched inequality" experienced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities that was promised by his department back in June 2019?

Poverty is not just a matter of low income; it is also experienced as powerlessness and lack of voice. While I welcome the acknowledgement in the levelling-up White Paper of the importance of community-led regeneration and the role that community wealth funds might play in that and in developing all-important social infrastructure, I would like to have seen greater emphasis on this. It is said that residents will have more of a say; I hope that they will have a say on more than just changing street names and al fresco dining, as set out in the notes on the Queen's Speech from No. 10. There also needs to be a commitment to lowering the barriers to participation faced by marginalised groups, including those in poverty.

Finally, it is simply unbelievable that, yet again, the gracious Speech did not mention the employment Bill promised in the Conservative manifesto. If now, when a growing proportion of the workforce suffers labour market insecurity in various forms, is not the right time for the Bill, as Ministers have claimed in the past, when is the right time? As it is, the absence of the Bill from this year's legislative programme means, among other things, that there is still no carers' leave and still no reform of the hopelessly ineffective shared parental leave scheme, which has been under evaluation for over four years. Both are important to the levelling-up agenda, particularly from a gender perspective, as emphasised so ably by my noble friend Lady Prosser. More generally, the Women's Budget Group comments that instead of

"meaningful measures that would have provided reassurances at a time of increasing financial insecurity ... we have a set of policies that fail to consider the reality of women's lives and fail to deliver the change women need."

These various omissions from the gracious Speech mean that the Government's programme for the coming year holds out no hope for those who, having first

borne the main burden of austerity, are now facing catastrophe, as they are hit hardest by the cost of living crisis to which the Government have no meaningful answer.

4.39 pm

Baroness Humphreys (LD): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to contribute to the debate on the humble Address. This gracious Speech has been written by a Government full of confidence and swagger, secure in the knowledge that their 80-seat majority in the Commons, together with the programme appeasing the Prime Minister's critics within his own parliamentary party, will ensure that most of their proposed legislation will be enacted. However, it is a Government who are, according to the *Telegraph* on 8 May, "in denial" after last week's local government election results.

These elections showed that the tectonic plates are shifting beneath the Government's feet and that the foundations of their large majority are beginning to crumble. Last Thursday's Tory losses of nearly 500 seats are of course shrugged off by the Government and explained away as the result of mid-term blues but let us for a moment imagine that, if this were an elected Chamber and we were returning today after true mid-term elections representing the will of the people, we would be questioning whether the Government continued to have a mandate to carry out their legislative programme in this new Session.

The people of Wales spoke loudly and clearly too. The total number of councils now run by the Tories in Wales is a big round zero, and they also suffered the loss of nearly half their seats: not a resounding endorsement of this Government's performance so far and hardly a mandate for the continuation of the damage already done to our devolved settlements.

It appears that the scales are falling off the eyes of voters. Those who believed the promises on the side of the bus, and the promises of sunlit uplands, now face a cost-of-living crisis and know that they were misled. Our farmers who believed that life would be better after Brexit, and those who heard the "not a penny less" promise on post-EU funding for Wales and believed it, now know that they were misled too. Sadly, this gracious Speech does nothing to help the millions of families and pensioners facing soaring food, energy and fuel bills, and facing the prospect of soaring inflation. It does nothing to support farmers on the brink. It does nothing to ease the sense of abandonment felt by so many, as the Prime Minister and Chancellor stand back showing little sympathy or regret for their situation.

The Government's levelling-up agenda focuses heavily on the shared prosperity fund. I want to make a couple of comments on this and the "not a penny less" promise by the UK Government. Wales qualified for Objective 1 status under EU funding schemes precisely because West Wales and the Valleys was deemed to be among the poorest regions of the European Union. How on earth can the Government justify a levelling-up agenda that does not emphasise the economic needs of communities? Why does the approach of the UK Government on this fund redirect economic development funds away from those areas where poverty is most concentrated? These are two fundamental questions

which exemplify the fundamental differences in approach between the UK and Welsh Governments. I would be grateful for a response from the Minister.

I welcome the move by the Welsh Government of initiating a partnership approach and creating the strongest possible model for post-EU regional investment in Wales, the framework for regional investment. It is the result of co-production with stakeholders, a public consultation, and a project to integrate international best practice with the OECD. I am pleased to learn that concessions have been made which will see regional allocations to local authorities in Wales align with the framework. That is a step in the right direction.

Over the next three financial years the shared prosperity fund will provide £585 million to local authorities in Wales. While this spending package compares favourably to other UK nations, it certainly does not meet the Government's "not a penny less" commitment and leaves the Welsh Government facing a loss of more than £1 billion in unreplaced funding over that period. This is not lost on the Welsh electorate. They have seen the UK Government bypass and undermine our Senedd in the distribution of the shared prosperity fund and attempt to emasculate it in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act, the Subsidy Control Act and other Acts, and they anticipate similar treatment in the Bills referred to in the gracious Speech—all, according to Ministers, in the name of the binding the union together. If the Government were to examine the results of the local government elections in the devolved nations, they might come to the conclusion that our electorates have a different view from them.

Finally, I was delighted to hear the reference to Great British Railways in the gracious Speech and would be interested to know what plans the Government have to improve the railway infrastructure in Wales, an issue that is not devolved. We have been making the case for improvements in terms of electrification for years. I have referred to this in responses to at least two or three gracious Speeches. If levelling up is to mean anything, it means levelling up our railway service in Wales. I will be grateful for the Minister's comments.

4.47 pm

Lord Cameron of Dillington (CB): My Lords, like others, I look forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford, which follows this speech.

Like the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans, I want to talk about the levelling up of rural England, its economy and its communities. In many ways, I am firing his second barrel for him, but I assure noble Lords that there was no collusion between us. It has long been a bone of contention that urban local authorities get 48% more central government support per head than their rural counterparts. That is quite a large percentage, and it means that rural council tax payers pay an average of 17% more than their urban cousins.

In health too there are inequalities. The most expensive age cohort to treat medically is from 65 to death, and while in urban England some 16% of the population is over 65, in rural England it is 24% as people like to retire to the countryside. In Devon, a very attractive place to retire to, the figure is 26%. So why is it that

[LORD CAMERON OF DILLINGTON]
health funding in the county of Devon, for example, is 40% per head less than the national average and nearly 80% lower than in London?

These are old saws which I have mentioned before in this House, and I will not dwell on them. I want to talk about opportunities in the countryside that the Government can help us with at fairly minimal cost. As the right reverend Prelate mentioned, two weeks ago, our APPG for Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse launched a report on levelling up the rural economy to enable us countryfolk to better help ourselves, and the nation, by growing our rural economy, something that must be absolutely relevant to the underlying message inherent in the Queen's Speech.

At the moment, the rural economy is 18% less productive than the national average, and it has been calculated that closing that gap could be worth up to £43 billion per annum and could create hundreds of thousands of jobs. I maintain that rural people are inherently enterprising. We just need a bit of focus and help from the powers that be. We actually have considerably more VATable businesses per head of population than urban England, and the one thing to underline—I make this absolutely clear—is that more than 85%, possibly 90%, of these businesses and jobs have nothing to do with agriculture, forestry or the land. There are more manufacturing businesses in the countryside than in the towns, not per head but per se, although mostly they are SMEs or micro-businesses.

This is my first request: politicians, and above all planners, must try to think of villages and market towns as potential economic hotspots. In the past they would have all had their butchers, bakers and candlestick makers, so why do planners now only think of them as dormitory communities, as places people use just to sleep? Every village needs its own workspace for its own small businesses—note that “businesses” is plural. Every village needs extra affordable housing. This is so important for businesses and balanced communities. It is something the last Government purposefully removed from the reach of locals by preventing planning authorities from making affordable homes an essential part of any new village development. That was an unnecessary disgrace. The decision was designed to help smaller builders, but it is no way to help them by forcing the less well-off out of their local housing market. That decision needs to be reversed. Villages should not just be dormitories for rich people; they should be places where all people can work, rest and play.

Then there is tax. Farms and estates have been encouraged to diversify for years, yet the moment they start a new business it has to have its own set of accounts and tax returns, which is very expensive in terms of the business owners' time and professional fees. It would be far better if all businesses run by a farmer on a given piece of land could come under one umbrella as one rural business unit, in the same way as a wheat enterprise, for instance, comes under the same business umbrella as a dairy enterprise on a mixed farm. We need a rural business unit within the tax system.

The importance of developing the right skills in the countryside cannot be overestimated. We need help getting the right training for youngsters and making

that training accessible to our rural young. Government-supported apprenticeship schemes only work in larger businesses, although I see that the Cumbria LEP—I note that its chair, the noble Lord, Lord Inglewood, is in his place—is experimenting with a shared apprenticeship scheme involving clusters of businesses. If that works, it could be a big help.

Our youngsters also require help with transport to get to training and their first jobs. The Wheels to Work schemes, which I have mentioned in this House before and which used to be supported by central government, are brilliant. They are no longer supported. Many of your Lordships will not know what Wheels to Work schemes are about. They can best be described by asking two simple questions. First, how does a youngster in the countryside get to their first job without a set of wheels? There are no buses going from A to B at 8 am, or for that matter, going from A to C, D, E or Z. Secondly, how does a youngster get a set of wheels without a job to pay for it?

The simple answer to this Catch-22 problem is to lend them a moped. The scheme does this so that their access to training or jobs is secure. After six to nine months in work, they have to get their own set of wheels or buy their moped out of the scheme. Then they will probably never trouble social services again for the rest of their lives. The schemes cost less than the jobseeker's allowance otherwise payable, so the Government would be saving money by supporting them. We desperately need the return of central government support for Wheels to Work schemes.

The one item that is really needed and does, I am afraid, cost money is connectivity. The Government must set a road map for post 2025 to deliver 100% high-speed broadband, and 100% mobile phone connectivity, as soon as possible; the latter is just as important as the former.

Finally, and I have been banging on about this for at least 20 years, we must strengthen the whole process of rural proofing. Rural affairs are not just for Defra. We need the processes, and above all the training in the problems of rural life, to be an inherent part of DLUHC, BEIS, the Department of Health and Social Care, DCMS, the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. It is a problem that needs gripping from the very heart of government—namely, the Cabinet Office—so that it flows naturally through every department and at every level within those departments. As I say, I am not asking for much, just a bit more rural focus.

4.55 pm

The Lord Bishop of Guildford (Maiden Speech): My Lords, it is a privilege to be making my maiden speech in this most important debate on Her Majesty's gracious Speech. I thank noble Lords for their welcome this afternoon.

As I have taken my first infant steps as a Member of the House, I have been struck by the genuine warmth and friendliness that I have experienced from fellow Members, along with House officials and staff. I am equally impressed by the quality of the debate that I have witnessed and the probing but courteous spirit in which it has been exercised. I have also begun to connect with those involved in the area of freedom of

religion and belief, in which I have a lifelong interest, and I applaud their efforts to advance these basic human rights around the globe.

As a much younger man, my life might realistically have travelled in three directions: music, the law or the Church. My father was a professional musician, and, after a somewhat unconvincing start on the piano and clarinet, I picked up a bassoon one day and took to it like a duck to water. Playing in the National Youth Orchestra was a particular joy in my teenage years, and it was a genuine wrench to leave that all behind when I increasingly felt called in a different direction.

Meanwhile, with a Cambridge law degree under my belt, I was working in a junior capacity for a criminal law firm in Covent Garden. I would have made a happy lawyer, I think, specialising in criminal or family law, but the call towards ordination would not go away. One down for the law, as Michael Corkery QC kindly put it, and one up for God. Within a couple of years, I was back in Cambridge, where I first set eyes on my future wife, during a lecture given by a young, bearded Welshman with the improbable name of Dr Rowan Williams.

My ordained ministry began with three years living on a council estate in Redditch, where I led a small congregation, meeting in the church middle school. From there, we moved to Notting Hill, an area that introduced me to the disturbingly localised nature of inequality, with the very poor often living cheek by jowl with the very rich, and the church offering the only place where the two worlds met. Along with a community café and prison visiting group, we there started a nursery school where parents contributed what they could afford. Somehow, by God's grace, we were able to pay the teachers' salaries at the end of each month.

There were not quite the same extremes during my 12 years leading a lively church in Twickenham, but even there we had plenty of takers for our weekly suppers for the homeless, and we encountered fresh levels of deprivation when we started a congregation on the Ivybridge estate, which, for rugby enthusiasts in the House, is those mid-rise tower blocks adjacent to the international stadium.

Then, in 2008, I became Bishop of Aston in Birmingham diocese. I became Bishop of Guildford seven years later, thereby moving from the diocese with the most deprivation in the country to the diocese with the least. That move has made me recognise both the urgency of the task to level up regions across the UK and its extraordinary difficulty if we are to do more than simply tinker around the edges. Like many others in this House, I have witnessed at first hand the huge disparity in life chances, and indeed life expectancy, between those in our poorest districts and those in our wealthiest. The contrast is chilling.

Yet even within the 165 parishes that make up the diocese of Guildford—a diocese that comprises two-thirds of leafy Surrey; Aldershot, Fleet and Farnborough in north-east Hampshire; and a single parish each in Sussex and Greater London—there are huge localised inequalities, which remind me a little of my years in Notting Hill and north Kensington. Cobham has a food bank, as do Farnham, Dorking and 30 other communities within the diocese. Some of these are

part-funded by the Bishop of Guildford's community fund, set up by one of my predecessors. I spent a morning in one of them just a couple of weeks ago.

Although I would never wish to set the local in competition with the regional when it comes to the levelling-up agenda, I welcome the White Paper's acknowledgement of both phenomena and encourage this House to keep both in mind as this debate develops over the coming months, not least in the context of the inflationary pressures that are making those food banks busier than ever.

It is tough to live in a deprived community—there is absolutely no question about that—but it is also tough to be deprived in a wealthy community, constantly surrounded by reminders of how the other half lives. Indeed, research has demonstrated time and again that the least happy societies are not always the poorest but the most unequal. So I will follow this debate and others with great interest, and hope to make a small but genuine contribution to the life of your Lordships' House in the months and years to come.

5 pm

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, I am delighted to follow my right reverend friend the Bishop of Guildford and I congratulate him on his excellent maiden speech. I warmly welcome him to the House and to these Benches, and I have no doubt that he will have a significant contribution to make, drawing not only on his long ordained ministry in a diverse range of social settings, as we have already heard a little about, but from his wider life experiences. It may well be that he has been a loss to the world of law and music but definitely a gain to the world of the Church. I very much look forward to working with him here in the future.

Last year I was appointed to be the Church of England's lead bishop on housing, so I was especially pleased to see the references in Her Majesty's gracious Speech to the needs of our social housing sector. I welcome the opportunities that the social housing regulation Bill will provide in this Session to make some valuable progress.

Social housing plays an incredibly important role in providing security and stability; this has been brought into increasingly stark relief as the cost of living rises. Measures previously set out in the Government's social housing White Paper to help ensure that social housing is safe and of good quality, and to bring about greater transparency and accountability, were a step in the right direction. The removal of the serious detriment test and the cap on fines for landlords' non-compliance, the emphasis on having safety as a fundamental objective of the Regulator of Social Housing, and the setting up of an advisory panel to amplify tenants' voices will be significant, positive developments. I also commend the principles set out in the Together with Tenants work of the National Housing Federation.

Research by the charity Shelter has found that "250,000 people are homeless, stuck in temporary accommodation" and that in total 17.5 million people are "living in overcrowded, dangerous, unstable or unaffordable housing." I urge Her Majesty's Government to be ambitious in their response to this crisis. The strengthening of tenants' voices is welcome, but it must be coupled with significant

[THE LORD BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD]
investment in new social housing. As recommended by the Commission of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on Housing, Church and Community in last year's report, *Coming Home*, for there to be adequate housing support for low-income households, there needs to be a review of how the social security system operates here.

The *Coming Home* report, which I commend to all noble Lords, describes our housing crisis as "neither accidental, nor inevitable". It sets out recommendations for action and change, for the Church as well as for the Government—all of which it would be good to discuss with the Minister. At the centre of these is the critical need for a long-term, cross-party housing strategy to bring about more truly affordable housing and healthy communities, and to ensure that no one has to live in unacceptable housing conditions. It is essential that all key stakeholders are part of that process, including central and local government, landowners, developers, landlords, homeowners, housing associations and faith organisations, including the Church of England. We all have a valuable part to play and we in the Church are eager to play ours.

We need more housing, but that on its own is not enough to address the housing crisis. Good housing needs to be

"sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying".

Houses are not simply buildings; they are homes built to enable flourishing lives in thriving communities. As the prophet Isaiah affirms, "People will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings and in quiet resting places".

Public land should be used in such a way as to maximise long-term social, environmental and economic value, not simply sold to the highest bidder. I urge Her Majesty's Government to apply that lens to their housing policy.

I applaud the work taken forward across this House and the other place, in debates in previous parliamentary Sessions on the Fire Safety and Building Safety Acts, to address the cladding crisis. I hope and trust that the Government will act with urgency to remove all unsafe cladding on residential blocks.

I could say much more, but I will conclude by saying two things briefly. First, the ongoing energy crisis brings home once again the importance of improving the quality and sustainability of housing stock, including meeting decarbonisation targets for existing and new homes. Fitting adequate insulation and heat pumps to replace gas boilers will be key here. Secondly, and more generally, so many of the social problems that we encounter in this country, from poor mental health to high crime rates, from school exclusion to domestic abuse, and many more, have their roots in or are exacerbated by poor housing. If we can find a way of addressing the housing crisis, I believe that we will see an easing of pressure on the NHS, prisons and other social services. I look forward to working with noble Lords across the House on all these matters.

5.06 pm

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My Lords, I, too, welcome the words of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford, who will bring a fresh dynamic to our discussions. I understand that he wrote a setting

of George Herbert's "Love Bade Me Welcome" that was sung at his consecration. The poem was read by me at my father's funeral, so I hope that we will agree on many matters.

I refer to my business and property interests in the register.

We face the most difficult economic prospects for nearly a century. Let us spend a second or two letting that sink in. The immediate outlook is sombre at best. This needs to be explained honestly and openly to people. Economic problems mean reductions in real incomes for many, if not most, people for a period, and we will get nowhere if we pretend otherwise. Of course, we want to and must escape to the broad sunny economic uplands as soon as possible, but let us be clear and frank about the place from whence we are starting.

There is no time to dwell on how all this has come about. Suffice to say that among the many elements have been: one, the remnants of the 2008 financial crisis; two, the adjustments necessary following Brexit; three, Covid; and, four, Ukraine. Rarely have so many major problems emerged at once, and it is no wonder that we have a serious problem.

I now turn to significant, though lesser, issues in which I take a particular interest. I chair your Lordships' Committee on the Built Environment. I believe strongly that building more houses of decent quality, providing homes that people can afford to buy and rent and improving our crumbling transport system is essential for social cohesion. The Government's proposals for growth, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill and the transport Bill are therefore welcome in principle. However, as always, the devil will be in the detail.

I am sorry to see nothing substantive on business rate reform. Revaluation is important, but that does not begin to tackle the crisis on our high streets, with empty shops even in more prosperous towns such as Salisbury, where I come from, or Leeds or Brecon, where I was last week. Successive Governments have also failed to recognise the role that supermarkets play in bringing affordable food and fresh veg and fruit to struggling families and pensioners, yet their rates bills have gone up and up as the online revolution has played havoc with our shops and markets.

I have three further points. First, on housing, in January my committee produced a compelling report, *Meeting Housing Demand*, indicating a number of actions which, if taken, could contribute to meeting our housing demand better. I was glad to see some of our ideas on the role of SMEs—small and medium-sized enterprises—in housebuilding taken on board. There is a big adverse trend here to reverse. SME building represents just 10% of new homes compared with 39% in Mrs Thatcher's time, although I have to say that for SMEs speed of approval in planning is even more important than the Government's proposal to abolish the planning fees. We have to reduce planning risk, make more small sites available and increase access to finance for SMEs.

I hope the committee's ideas on increasing housing for the exploding number of the elderly will also be taken up by the Government and their new task force on new housing for the elderly and vulnerable. We will keep a close eye on this work.

The committee also made important recommendations on skills shortages, which are worse in the construction sector and in our planning departments than elsewhere. Progress here is essential if our aspirations for renewal and growth are to be met.

Of course, we need to celebrate success where we can, such as the 1.65 million homes that have been built all over the country since 2010 as the UK's population has expanded from 63 million to 67 million. However, I fear that government plans are not adequately tackling the chilling effect we found that the planning system is having on housebuilding and infrastructure. Today's idea of giving local communities a referendum on individual local design codes or votes on developments in their streets has aspects of a gimmick about it. I fear it will slow the system down yet further, making it even more difficult for young people to get on the housing ladder. Taking powers over people's second homes is certainly a gimmick and one curiously incompatible with Conservative principles of property rights. Do the Government want to lose a battle with their strongest supporters? That appears to be the course they are embarking on.

Secondly, on transport, my committee is now looking at public transport in cities and towns, especially in urban areas outside London. We are concerned about how public transport best meets users' preferences and represents value for money. We are particularly interested in innovation and connectivity and investigating transport hubs—for example, where buses, which have rightly been mentioned several times today, meet trams or trains—and digital ticketing. These all need to be fit for purpose, simple and speedy. I see that the transport Bill provides opportunities for innovation in ticket retailing. I ask my noble friend the Minister whether her Bill will implement the recommendations on ticketing that our committee made last year.

Thirdly, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate my personal concerns about e-scooters and the Government's reluctance to tackle the wild west—a term already used for pedicabs by my noble friend Lady Stowell—that exists on our streets and our pavements. I hope I do not have to end up in A&E for this to sink in. Available figures date back to the year ending June 2021—even then, and that was before the current craze for e-scooters really took off, there were 931 casualties in e-scooter accidents, three of them fatal.

As I have said before, I would ban e-scooters; I think e-bikes are much less dangerous and almost as convenient. However, if the Government wish to regulate instead, they need to get on with it immediately and not take too long over legislation. We need a speed limit, we need riders to wear helmets, and we need to make it a criminal offence to ride scooters on pavements, with a power to confiscate and perhaps destroy the offending items. We also need to provide a budget, perhaps financed by the e-scooter companies, for the police to enforce the law on pavements, which otherwise will become no-go areas not only for us but for the vulnerable and disabled who stand to be injured—that would really improve our towns and cities and push people into their cars.

In conclusion, I welcome the Queen's Speech and look forward to working across the House to scrutinise the Bills in the programme. Our economy is in trouble.

However, better, less siloed policy on housing, planning and transport could contribute to productivity, to growth and, above all, to the happiness of those for whom a comfortable home, preferably owned by them, is an enduring aspiration.

5.15 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab): My Lords, I add my commendation for the splendid maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. He was quite right in pointing out that local inequalities can be some of the most damaging things. I ran healthcare in north Kensington and Notting Hill, and I remember trying to explain the role of a health visitor in visiting new mums to the Health Minister, whose daughter lived in Notting Hill and had been outraged by the fact that she had to expect a health visitor visit, because that was something that the nanny took care of. I had to explain to him that if you were a single-parent drug addict, unemployed and living in a squat in north Kensington, you might well value the services health visitors.

A key part of the levelling-up agenda is the proposed changes in the planning system. It has already been said that the devil will be in the detail, particularly regarding what the new approach to environmental assessment will look like and whether it really will improve outcomes for the natural environment—I hope it will.

The disappointment is that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill fails to focus on a key issue, which is the increasing pressure on land use from competing demands from all sorts of directions—housing, infrastructure, food security, biodiversity recovery, climate change and carbon sequestration, biofuels, access, recreation and management of flood risk. All those things are now increasingly pressing on the same areas of land. The University of Cambridge sustainability initiative's calculation, that if we were to meet all these land pressures we would need a third more land, constantly needs to be brought to the fore. I very much welcome the establishment of the land use Select Committee in your Lordships' House, so ably led by the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, but regret that the forthcoming legislation as signalled in the Queen's Speech will not tackle this pressing issue.

Some of the changes that we see proposed for the planning system, such as introducing naked bribes for local communities to accept housing development and giving residents more say over changing street names, are probably less important than resolving these real pressures on land, which are fundamental to economic development, to climate change, to biodiversity and indeed to jobs. Can the Minister assure the House that the Government will actively consider the need for a strategic approach to land use, along the lines of those already existing in Wales and Scotland, to be brought in for England?

The second issue I want to focus on relates to transport. We have another HS2 Bill—the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill—which feels a bit like Groundhog Day. The last few HS2 Bills have meant another set of ancient woodlands being damaged or destroyed. Successive stages of HS2 do not seem to learn from the failings of the previous stages in this

[BARONESS YOUNG OF OLD SCONE]

respect. I declare my interest as chairman of the Woodland Trust. I am sure that the Minister will recall the helpful interventions that she made the last time that we had an HS2 Bill, which resulted in a requirement laid on HS2 Ltd to report annually on its impact on ancient woodland. Alas, we got the first annual report a few weeks ago and it is pretty inadequate. It is a sort of propaganda statement of intentions about ancient woodland and some of the rather feeble mitigation factors that HS2 has introduced, rather than a proper analysis of the real impact that each stage of HS2 has had on ancient woodland. May I ask the Minister to review the report to make sure that the next one is better in assessing real impact? Can she tell us how the Government will insist that HS2 Ltd learns lessons from its previous stages and commits to implementing the lessons learned in this next stage before we see the Bill come to this House?

Perhaps I could ask the Minister also to note that it is not just the impacts of HS2 on ancient woodland that need to be handled more effectively. Increasingly, we are seeing new energy distribution networks and new energy sources, such as hydrogen pipelines and CO₂ collection networks, coming up the agenda. The first stages of these proposals are already showing huge impacts on ancient woodland.

Turning to the Government's broader legislative programme, we will have a Brexit freedoms Bill to make it easier to amend or remove outdated EU laws that might otherwise take "several years" to change under the "current rules". I am concerned on two counts here. Many noble Lords will recall how hard we had to fight to ensure that important environmental legislation was safely brought across as EU retained law. Noble Lords will also recall how unwilling the Government were during the passage of the Environment Act to preserve adherence to the central principles of environmental legislation which European legislation enshrines.

I am sure that noble Lords will therefore share my distrust of the impact that this Brexit freedoms Bill could have on environmental legislation, especially since it means that such legislation can be swept away without proper parliamentary scrutiny in the interests of speed. One can understand why the Government are interested in speed; being as unpopular as they are, they desperately need something to be able to wave as a gain from Brexit before the next election. But I remind the Government that all the polls are telling us that the UK public—especially young people, who are important voters for the future—and British business want strong and clear environmental legislation that persists and is not changed regularly. That is what EU retained environmental legislation provides.

Can the Minister tell us which EU retained laws, beyond those listed in the *Benefits of Brexit* paper published in January, the Government propose to change? Does the Minister not agree that it is slightly bizarre that the Government complain in the more detailed exposition of the Bill we have in the paperwork from No. 10 that much of the law they envisage sweeping away was

"imposed and changed with minimal parliamentary scrutiny in the past",

yet they are themselves planning to make sweeping changes, again without consultation or parliamentary scrutiny? Consultation and parliamentary scrutiny are important in these issues or they are not. Could the Government please make up their mind? I believe that proper consultation and parliamentary scrutiny are important and that these important laws should be subject to them.

Perhaps the most glaring gap in the proposed legislative programme is in respect of climate change and biodiversity decline. Only six months after COP 26, when we led the world to recognise what crisis measures it needed to meet the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity decline, we are not ourselves tackling these two challenges in our very next legislative programme. I have just one example. The Government are rightly concerned about the impact of the rising cost of living, yet the legislative programme has nothing on home energy conservation measures, which would immediately help households save money on fuel bills and ensure warm homes as well as reducing carbon, creating jobs and enhancing our energy security. Why not? Should the levelling-up strategy have a mission on net zero and biodiversity gain? Should the levelling-up strategy recognise the economic boost and green jobs that action on climate change and biodiversity delivers? The noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, rightly listed the challenges of inflation and insecurity that we are currently facing, but these must not wipe out our concentration on the existing existential challenges of climate change and biodiversity decline, which will not go away.

5.24 pm

Lord Mountevans (CB): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the right reverend Prelate on his excellent maiden speech. I look forward to his future contributions.

I very much look forward to studying the detail of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill. As an island nation, the coastal communities are a vital gateway; 95% of goods entering or leaving the UK go by sea, 50% of our food arrives by sea, and eight out of 10 cars exported do so by sea. But people and communities around our coasts can often suffer the highest levels of economic and social hardship. As we know, seaside towns can present a sad aspect, particularly out of season. Many of the challenges of the rural economy that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, mentioned also apply to the coastal economy.

Specifically on the coastal economy, most existing government funding for these communities has focused on heritage, recreational and arts projects. Only four of the 44 projects announced in the latest round of the coastal revival fund in 2018-19 could be described as business. That investment is of course valuable, but it does not unlock or engage with stimulating business investment.

There is a need for co-ordinated and concerted action. Coastal communities are uniquely positioned to play a leading role in the UK's net-zero transition. There is, for example, huge potential for government and private investment to co-invest to bring electricity to ports so that ships can use shore power, thereby avoiding emissions; we are seeing this elsewhere in the

world. We need to apply green technologies as they develop. Development of offshore green energy has had a major impact on areas such as the Humber and East Anglia, but new industries such as carbon capture, utilisation and storage, as well as offshore floating wind, are also areas of great potential for some coastal communities.

We need a partnership approach between industry, government, local authorities and regional leaders. The local talent pipeline needs to be grown, addressing shortcomings in the apprenticeship levy, developing specific programmes where needed to give extra support, for example for digital skills.

I suggest the following steps to the Minister: the establishment of a coastal task force to enable cross-departmental working, the very strong case for a dedicated coastal Minister, and the development of a dedicated coastal strategy. Finally on coastal communities, what plans, if any, do the Government have to roll out some of the freeports' economic benefits beyond the limited number of areas that currently benefit?

In concluding, I switch to the ports Bill. I know the industry is very concerned that the greatest care should be exercised to follow the rules of the ILO and to avoid imposing UK wages on ships other than those now being considered by the Government and which also call at least once a week in the UK. If, inadvertently, the provisions are applied more widely, there is a profound risk of irretrievable damage to the United Kingdom tonnage tax scheme.

5.27 pm

Baroness Benjamin (LD): My Lords, I, too, take the opportunity during the humble Address to congratulate the right reverend Prelate on his maiden speech and Her Majesty the Queen on her 70th year of reign, during which she has upheld her promise to serve the nation faithfully. I wish her a happy up-and-coming Platinum Jubilee celebration. She has been a role model and example of what dedication to duty is all about.

Over the past 40 years, I have dedicated my life to the well-being of children, and as vice-president of Barnardo's I make no apology for arguing that levelling up cannot succeed if children are not placed firmly at the heart of all government policy, including what is proposed in the levelling-up Bill. This Bill must pass all the key tests of improving opportunities and outcomes for vulnerable children. That is because, over the past three years, it has been estimated that, in the UK, 4.3 million children are living in relative poverty, which is about 37% of children. That is scandalous. Can the Minister assure me that a mission to tackle child poverty will be included in the Bill? I hope he will agree with me and Barnardo's that levelling up cannot succeed while children and families experience rising poverty, homelessness and hunger.

As currently drafted in the Bill, the 12 missions do not include a drive to improve the well-being of children and young people or address the delay in treatment of the 88,000 children—as of December 2021—on the waiting list for NHS treatments. All this is happening at a time when we know that one in six children have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Unfortunately, the *Levelling Up* White Paper does not

even begin to grapple with the wider health inequalities that continue to blight this country, and our children are at the very heart of this. Yet we know that growing up in poverty leads to worse health outcomes and a reduced life expectancy. Will the Minister tell us what discussions the Government have had on expanding the health mission in the Bill to include health inequalities?

Another key issue missing from the levelling-up agenda is investment in early support for families. We know that the early years of a child's life are crucial for improving outcomes later on. We also know that families can face challenges at different points, including in the teenage years. Therefore, parents must have support in place if they are worried about their children's safety online or about whether they are being targeted by criminal gangs. Extending family hubs to every community could help to provide support for struggling families and potentially save money in the long term. That is common sense, because Barnardo's recent report *It Takes a Village* found that family hubs not only have a positive impact but also save money. For every £1 invested in this service, savings to the state were estimated at £2.60. Therefore, will investment in early support for families be included in the levelling-up Bill?

Free bus travel for young people in care is an essential part of levelling up and Barnardo's has been working with a local charity in Cornwall called Carefree to support 25 care leavers who campaigned for free bus travel in their local area. A report into the project found that free bus passes supported young people who had been in the care system so they could afford to travel to education, employment, and training, as well as supporting vital social connections and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. One young person involved in the scheme said:

"The bus pass just made me feel free. It gave me hope."

It is such a little thing, but so important. It is our moral duty to restore hope to some of the most vulnerable young people in this country. Making free bus travel available to all care-experienced young people across the country would represent a tangible step in levelling-up opportunities for some of the most vulnerable in our society. Will the Minister meet with me and Barnardo's to discuss how to make sure that the levelling-up agenda and the promised legislation can really and truly transform opportunities for vulnerable children and young people across the country and put them at the heart of the matter?

The importance of play and physical activity is absolutely vital to good physical development, social and emotional well-being, and speech and language. However, the restrictions on the availability of good outdoor spaces in our towns and cities have had a massive impact on levels of child play and physical activity. The majority of the UK population is clustered into urban areas, and one in eight UK households have no outdoor space in which children can play. This rises to one in five in London, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities, the low paid and the unemployed.

For many families, community playgrounds are a significant necessity in the lifelong health of their children. We all remember the thrill of playing outdoors, the fun and laughter. Let us bring that back into the world of children, for them to experience that fun.

[BARONESS BENJAMIN]

In the absence of dedicated funding for playgrounds from central government, the provision and upkeep of play spaces have fallen upon the already severely stressed local authority budgets. This needs to be addressed urgently. We know that severe problems flow from inactivity, as we see the increased growth in obesity and mental health problems. The situation was bad enough before the pandemic but has been turbocharged since. Does the Minister agree that it is time to really get to grips with this issue so that the present trends can be not only halted but reversed? What steps are the Government taking to develop a dedicated strategy to increase the opportunities for children to play outdoors and to bring fun, joy and happiness into their lives as they face the scary, brutal world we live in today?

Wide and varied children's television content is incredibly important in shaping children's lives and levelling up their future, with programmes reflecting their lives and their world. I hope the Government will give careful and full consideration to how children's PSB programmes will be funded on both commercial channels and the BBC. Without the protection of the licence fee and the Young Audiences Content Fund, the future of quality children's programmes looks vulnerable. That is a dangerous thing to happen. Can the Minister reassure me that this will be taken into consideration? I declare an interest as per the register.

Finally, I once again plead with the Government to appoint a Cabinet-level Minister for children to champion the issues I have highlighted and be directly responsible for the well-being of our children and young people. As I keep repeating, childhood lasts a lifetime, and that is why levelling up policy is so vital for their future.

5.37 pm

Lord Balfre (Con): My Lords, I too welcome the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. As some noble Lords will know, from time to time I get up and talk about the need for this House to reform itself. The Bishops' Benches show that you can have temporary peerages, you can time-limit them and you can limit the numbers. I am not saying that we should all join the established Church to get in here, but I point to the fact that it is possible to make changes.

I shall start by declaring an interest. I am president of BALPA, the pilots' union, and have been a trade union member literally since I left school at 16. I want to talk about some of the things that we overlook. One of them is that we have a very odd idea of what constitutes a trade unionist. If you ask the average person, particularly the average *Daily Mail* reader, they will point to someone who is male, stropky and communist, and who probably has a bit of a chip on their shoulder. That is about as wrong as you can get. The average trade unionist today is a woman in her 40s who will never, in her entire trade union life, go on strike. This person is also paying her dues each week to an organisation, the Trades Union Congress, where 33% of her colleagues vote for the Conservative Party. We and the Government need to remember this. The key thing we need to remember is that those in the trade union movement are our partners in prosperity, not our enemies.

We also need to remember that many of them are not particularly poor. I have spent all my life among the richer end of the trade unions. The union for the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers' technical and administrative support staff, known as AUEW TASS, had the people who designed Rolls-Royce engines. It had some of the most highly skilled people building for Britain and dealing with the defence industries. In my time here, I have dealt with hospital consultants. I wonder how many people here realise that there is a hospital consultants' trade union affiliated to the TUC, but there is, and it does valuable work.

There are many others, of course. There is the British Medical Association. I once pointed out to David Cameron that it is a far more vicious and hardworking trade union than Bob Crow and the RMT, which some people think was the epitome of difficult trade unionism. I tell you; if you want to meet a difficult bunch of trade unionists, go down to the Department of Health. It is packed full of them, as many Ministers with blood all over them from all parties can tell you.

I make these points because, looking at one particular group—BALPA, the pilots' union—we have a lot to offer. I am sorry that the Ministers replying to the debate are not in reverse order, because the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, knows of my interest in these matters. Things such as the Jet Zero strategy, which presents a credible pathway to decarbonising the aviation sector, need input from professional organisations, because the trade unions also want to decarbonise the aviation sector. The point I make to Ministers is that you need to get them in and work with them. You need to put them on the councils that are looking at these things and moving the whole industry forward.

I also ask the Government to put a bit more urgency into looking at the mutual recognition of pilots' licences. When we left the EU, we left a huge number of jobs uncompleted. One of them was the reciprocal endorsement of licences between the previous EU and the present UK. There is still a lot to sort out there, and I ask the Government to take that on board.

Finally, I ask my own Government here to take on board the continued absence of the promised Bill to improve workers' rights. If you want to send a positive message to the people who go out to work every day to make this a prosperous country, to produce the goods we need and to lead the high technology, you need a Bill that includes flexible working rights, protection against pregnancy discrimination, and a measure for keeping tips as part of a bill. I never understand why we have this antiquated American system and do not just add 10% or 12.5%, get it in and give it out to people; there are perfectly good precedents all over the continent.

I welcome what the Government have to say about ferries and minimum pay, but please make sure that the Bill is tough enough. We do not want a ship coming into port and the company saying, "But we've paid the minimum wage ever since the ship was three miles out from the port. Of course we didn't pay it before then; it was in international waters". If we are to have this Bill, please make sure that it works. Some of us on this side will be looking carefully at that.

Let me end on a positive note. The Conservative Party has a very good record on trade unions. One of the best Ministers of Labour in the history of this

country was a man called Walter Monckton, who was Churchill's Minister of Labour. Churchill gave him an easy instruction. He said, "The unions worked hard to win us the war. You must work hard as Minister of Labour to keep them onside for Britain". Walter Monckton did. He is still spoken about occasionally by people in the generation beyond mine as being a most successful Minister.

I am asking the Government to look at a complete change—no, not a complete change, because they are not hostile. I find that they are indifferent, which is often the problem. I ask them to look at and take a positive attitude towards bringing on board the huge number of people working for the prosperity of our country, one-third of them already voting for us. They are there. They are the low-hanging fruit of the next election, ready to be collected by a Government who respect their skills and realise the work that they are doing to make our country better, to build back better and to give us a better economy and a better country.

5.46 pm

Lord Snape (Lab): My Lords, I join the general acclamation of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford for his maiden speech. I hope the House will forgive me if I move from acclamation to condemnation so far as some aspects of the Queen's Speech are concerned. I will confine my remarks entirely to the transport section of the gracious Speech. I listened with interest to the Minister opening the debate. She painted a bright picture of the future, particularly the introduction of Great British Railways. It is not an organisation that has been greeted with such acclamation elsewhere. I refer your Lordships to yesterday's *Times* where, in the business section under the heading

"Danger signals flash at British Railways",

Mr Robert Lea had some hard facts, in his opinion, to express about this future organisation. He wrote:

"Does the consumer side with railway leaders who want to move ever closer to autonomous and guardless vehicles? Do passengers want or need the human interaction with ticket offices; or is everyone happy ordering tickets and getting journey information on an app? Are travellers relaxed that the track fitness regime can now be determined by algorithms and predictive maintenance rather than boots on the ballast?"

Scottish colleagues will be aware that the lack of boots on the ballast was directly responsible for the recent Stonehaven accident, where fortunately—I mean that sincerely—only three people were killed. Had it been a normal service train, the carnage would have been much greater. That accident was caused entirely by the failure of any boots on the ballast. Carillion, the contractor, installed the drainage system almost a decade ago. The system had gone without any physical checks over that decade, and that accident could have occurred at any time. The lack of maintenance and of boots on the ground ought to concern all of us who are concerned about railway safety and railway maintenance. That Network Rail, the organisation responsible for railway maintenance currently and in future, is proposing to dispose of 1,500 people ought to give us cause for concern.

So far, at least, Great British Railways appears to provide only photo-opportunities for the Secretary of State. The other thing is the lack of any detail about

future fares reorganisation. I have looked at fares reform, and I have mentioned it before in your Lordships' House, and before making this speech I consulted Mr Barry Doe, who those of us who take an interest in these matters know and respect as a man who has written a column called the "The Fare Dealer" for *Rail* for the past 20 years or so.

Mr Doe had this to say about fares, Great British Railways and the future:

"The supreme irony is that we have gone from a (nationalised) railway run totally by railway professionals to a so-called 'private' railway effectively run by civil servants ... BR had gone from pence-per-mile to selective pricing, invented railcards and reached the structure we know today. All that has happened since is a severe muddying of the waters with complicated ticket restrictions and parochial fares that have given rise to split ticketing—but no new structure: in short we have had a wasted quarter century when it comes to fares and need to recoup those lost years ... GBR must have an HQ with professional pricing managers, as BR once did, to ensure uniform fares"

and eradicate the nonsense of split ticketing. He concluded:

"The Treasury seems to be terrified of such fares reform lest it reduce income. That is as stupid as saying that Off-Peak fares reduce income. They don't, because they increase usage"—

and GBR must be given proper control of the fares structure in future.

I revert to the *Times* view of the future so far as Great British Railways and its structure are concerned. Mr Lea went on to say:

"We come out of the pandemic with a renationalised national rail system, commanded from the DfT's Marsham Street eyrie and operators merely fixed-fee contractors."

Again, this is something that has bothered those of us who take an interest in and speak regularly on these matters.

A couple of years ago, I invited the Minister to accompany me on a trip around the Birmingham outer ring road on a National Express bus. Unaccountably, she turned me down. As her noble friend Lord Lexden suggested the other day, I suggest that she uses Avanti trains and comes, perhaps with me, to Birmingham. If we catch a not-too-late train and arrive at Birmingham International station after 10 pm, there will be no staff. Birmingham International is not a wayside halt; it is an intercity station a mile or so from an international airport. After 10 pm, more than 20 trains go to destinations as diverse as London and Reading, as well as local trains to Birmingham and Coventry, yet there is no one to sell or collect a ticket. The expensively installed barriers are open from 10 pm, so lots of people travel by train after 10 pm from Birmingham International without paying their fare—and who can blame them? There is no check. Surely that is the weakness of a contracting system that pays a company such as Avanti regardless of whether it delivers a proper standard of service—and I am afraid that it does not. If Great British Railways is to persist with the idea that after 10 pm there is somehow no need to staff mainline stations, fare evasion—which in my opinion is already at a considerable height—will get worse in future.

I have to say to the Minister who replies that not all of us are thrilled with the idea of Great British Railways. Those of us who have worked in the railway industry are aware of the negative nature of the Treasury so far

[LORD SNAPE]

as expenditure in the railway industry is concerned. We are aware that civil servants love to second-guess railway managers on where expenditure should take place. One of the reasons we have so many uncomfortable trains at present is that over the years the Treasury has insisted on cramming more and more passengers into smaller and smaller trains. When in the 1980s British Rail replaced its classic diesel multiple-unit services, which were built as three-car units, the Treasury insisted that those three cars be replaced by two-car Sprinter trains and trains of similar ilk. Cramming in more passengers will not attract any more people to travel by rail, regardless of whether Great British Railways is in charge and whatever the colour and nature of the staff uniforms.

In conclusion, in the words of Mr Nat King Cole, so far as the railway industry is concerned, I can see only “trouble ahead”. Unless the Government give GBR and its management the freedom to properly run the railway and get the Treasury’s dead hand off the railway’s windpipe, trouble is what we shall see in the years to come.

5.54 pm

Baroness Valentine (CB): I begin by adding my welcome to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. I also declare that I am director of place and levelling up at Business in the Community, as well as chair of Heathrow Southern Railway. Also, for many years I ran London First and sat on the board of Crossrail.

Today, I will focus on the importance of government enabling business to play its part in contributing to economic development and social mobility. Every sector has its skill sets: national government on big-picture policy; local government on the gritty realities of dealing with deprivation; the third sector on supporting those for whom life is particularly challenging; and business on market insights, leading change and releasing potential. The win-win is when every sector participates and plays to its own strengths.

I have been involved in encouraging businesses to tackle civic challenges for decades and indeed learned much from the late Lord Sheppard of Didgemere. That has included business support for the Olympics, Teach First and Crossrail. I am delighted that Crossrail will open shortly and am sure that, once people ride on it, they will realise what a massive impact it has, adding 10% capacity to central London rail journeys. Lest anyone forget, London business is contributing billions to the cost through a special annual supplementary business rate, which London First helped to facilitate.

Once Crossrail is open, perhaps the Department for Transport will turn its attention to rail access to Heathrow from the south, thereby reducing illegal air pollution levels on the M25. This was launched as something called a “pathfinder project” in 2018. If I were being unkind, rather than a “pathfinder” I might call this a “meandering promenade across a boulder-strewn track”. I appreciate that this is not the time to spend public money in the south-east, but Heathrow Southern Railway, which I chair, has been ready to implement a privately funded solution for over five years. Can the Minister reassure me that concrete next steps from the market engagement exercise undertaken four years ago will be

announced at the same time as the rail network’s enhancement pipeline? This is not special pleading for either Heathrow Southern Railway or the south-east; it is simply encouraging the Government to act as the enabler they say they want to be.

I will focus particularly on the importance of business involvement in levelling up. Earlier this year, the Government announced their 12 levelling-up missions. These are a helpful articulation of where we need to get to by 2030. They include upskilling, rising employment and productivity—all natural territory for business. Perhaps less obviously, I believe business also has a key role in pride of place and local leadership, and in making the levelling-up aspirations a reality. Levelling up cannot be done to a place; there needs to be ambition that is of the place and owned by local champions, from the public, voluntary and private sectors, working together in a local collaboration.

Yesterday, I was in Bradford meeting the City of Culture expert panel. The Bradford 2025 bid has done an inspiring job of aligning thousands of people behind a single vision. Local business leaders, if engaged effectively, can help in clarifying realistic goals for a place, rather than a wish list dictated by a bewildering range of potential public or charitable funding sources. They can then use business disciplines to lead what is, in effect, a change management process, involving hitting milestones towards goals and deploying local resource as appropriate.

I worked in Blackpool for two years and am delighted that the town is working according to these principles and has recently been chosen as an exemplar of levelling up. The best of the town deals, launched by the Government a year or two ago, are performing in this way, but the Civil Service is short on people who instinctively work with business to deliver civic outcomes. The problem with defaulting to a public sector conversation is that there is often a tired narrative of the local authority pleading for funding from whatever central pot it can make its needs sort of fit, versus central government trying to keep funding to a minimum. The conversation needs to shift to a positive future for a place, supported by long-term funding aligned with the levelling-up missions.

This morning, Business in the Community launched its taskforce report on best practice for business involvement in place-based regeneration. Lessons include the benefit of “a local cross-sector partnership” with a shared vision, a champion independent of the council to help lead change and a local connector who works between public, private and voluntary sectors with no allegiance to any one sector in order to build trust.

Finally, as a piece of advice, I urge the Minister when bringing forward levelling-up legislation to include a clause obliging the formation of local levelling-up partnerships to make real the 12 levelling-up missions. Indeed, I will even offer to help draft the clause. With the winds of change swirling around us and the cost of living crisis upon us, levelling up is a challenge we collectively need to meet.

6 pm

Lord Inglewood (Non-Aff): My Lords, after the remarks earlier from the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, it will come as no surprise to anybody

that I, as chairman of the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, start by underscoring that I am in favour of levelling up. I am very pleased that the Minister in her opening remarks recognised what all of us involved have to understand—that it cannot be simply achieved by a single wave of an administrative, legislative or economic magic wand.

If you actually want to do something, the crucial starting point has to be capacity. If there is not the ability to complete the task in hand, it will fail. Capacity, I am afraid, is not universally present either in the centre of this country or across the more economically weak parts of our nation. Within this context, as the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, has just said, the business community needs to be involved and so must be involved. That is why local enterprise partnerships were established a decade or so ago. However, it was unfortunate that there was an insufficiently clear vision and idea of what they might do and how they might work.

Since I have only two more years or so to go in what is known as a level 3 area, I am not going to be affected by many of the changes which will result from the recent LEP review and be incorporated into the thinking surrounding levelling up. However, anyone in your Lordships' Chamber who has been involved in both these activities will know that they are different in many ways; businesspeople and politicians do not look at things in quite the same way.

It is very important that the way in which the business community and its input is going to be—so we are told—incorporated into the operation of the new local authority era should not be predicated on the basis that the business voice is subordinate to the activities of the local authority members and officers. If that were to happen, collaboration would fail because the business world has plenty of things to do. Despite a great deal of underlying good will, it will not get involved fully if it is perceived to be more or less the running dog of the councils and their politicians.

As was touched on by the noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, we need to be clear that business has been very hard hit over the last few years. Leaving the single market has caused a lot of economic damage and so has Covid, the war in Ukraine and inflation. In the area I come from, which is very heavily dependent on agriculture, the working of the current agricultural reform is very damaging.

As has already been said, business needs confidence, certainty and encouragement. Often populism does precisely the opposite. It is open to the Government to help or hinder in these respects, and I am afraid I do not think their track record is as strong as it should have been. As has already been said, the Government have to ensure appropriate infrastructure, not least in the context of digital connectivity which is seen—as pointed out by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans—as an absolute *sine qua non*, especially in parts of the country which are hard to reach.

The Government must get on and do things. For example, I understand that the idea, floated in the context of HS2, of cutting the Golborne link would actually reduce services to London from Scotland and northern England, on the western side, in a post-HS2 world. That seems absolutely crazy. If that kind of

thing happens, levelling up cannot be taken any more seriously than it can in the agricultural context, if the effect of the new trade agreements that we will enter into will discriminate positively in favour of farmers outside this country in respect of the environmental, welfare and husbandry standards required of food put into the UK marketplace. Discriminating in favour of foreigners cannot be a good component of levelling up.

Again, one of the greatest contributions of the part of England that I come from to the well-being of the UK economy is public goods, of which frankly no apparent recognition is properly made, in terms of their economic contribution to the local income. After all, we supply and manage the Lake District world heritage site, a large number of important environmental and landscape areas—which are enjoyed by everyone—and supply a huge amount of cultural and other goods to the rest of the country. Currently, quantities of carbon emitted elsewhere are sequestered there, and there will no doubt be more in the future, but no payments are made or planned in respect of what is being done for free for richer neighbours now. Indeed, much of the water used in Manchester and north-west England comes from our lakes. Whenever a lavatory is flushed in Manchester, this is done with Cumbrian water. If we were Aboriginals in Australia, we would doubtless demand and get massive subventions.

It has been said that skills are very important, perhaps more so than ever before. Certainly, one of the things that puzzles us in the Cumbrian Local Enterprise Partnership is that we are told that we will not be allowed to bid for skills provision in the future. Over the past few years, we were told that this was at the heart of our remit. After all, two-thirds of local enterprise partnerships' members are from the private sector and understand what is needed in business. In my and a lot of other people's view, one of the great weaknesses of skills training in the past has been that it has been led by the suppliers of the training too much, with insufficient regard paid to what is actually required in the economy outside.

Equally, we have heard reference to housing. One of the attributes of areas such as Cumbria—it is equally true of Devon and Cornwall—is that shortages of housing are a serious inhibitor of the development of the local economy. But the problem is not solved by building more and more houses. There are plenty of houses in these places; the problem is that the people who actually serve the local economy cannot afford to rent or buy them. We need to think differently about these things and take a leaf out of the book of building preservation trusts and their rolling funds, and things like that. For that matter, the Lakeland Housing Trust, for example—a body of which I have the good fortune to be president—acquires property that exists and then lets it at appropriate levels to local occupants. You can also put an occupancy restriction on an existing house, sell it on and roll it over.

Another thing that is important in the context of levelling up is the fact that we have to avoid the economic consequences of what I might call the branch plant phenomenon, where real profits generated are then expatriated to the head office, which may even be in a different country, and not reinvested in the places

[LORD INGLEWOOD]

where the money has been generated in the first place. This may well have suited the United Kingdom in the great days of the British Empire, but it does not help left-behind areas in England today.

Finally, one important thing that we need to understand is that public goods can be supplied by philanthropic individuals, companies and community organisations, and the good they do has little to do with the ownership and everything to do with the outcomes that are brought about. If the focus of levelling up is solely on who does things rather than on what is achieved, the result will be that the overall outcome will be less satisfactory than would otherwise be the case. Equally, when judging what things to support, the kind of quasi-automatic, ticking-the-box approach that seems to be a characteristic of public evaluation of projects means that, in reality, many small applicants will simply not bother to apply because it is too expensive, too onerous, and takes too much time. As has already been mentioned, it does not follow that competition automatically delivers the best quality, value-for-money outcomes. Indeed, they are and frequently may be suboptimal.

I am sure that we all agree that levelling up is good, but it is not good if it becomes a mere slogan. It has to be a coherent, thought-through and integrated approach which delivers long-term improvements rather than sexy-sounding headlines in the media. It is as simple as that.

6.11 pm

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con): My Lords, it is always a joy to follow my noble friend Lord Inglewood, who was without doubt one of my favourite, most capable and competent Ministers when I was in government. I could simply put my feet up and he would cover all the most complex and difficult topics. We have heard today again a thoughtful speech from him, covering in detail a great number of areas.

Before referring to the right reverend Prelate, I wanted to mention in passing my noble friends Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury and Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie, who made wonderful speeches yesterday in moving and seconding the Motion for the humble Address. To me, that is the most difficult thing that any of us are ever asked to do in this House, and I congratulate them on it. Just as a reflection of life in the House of Lords, my noble friend Lord Sherbourne was my contemporary, friend and ally in all those years when I worked with Margaret Thatcher. My noble friend Lady Fraser, a highly regarded and excellent woman, was a contemporary of my daughter when she was at Cambridge—so the generations move on.

The right reverend Prelate has been Bishop of Guildford for a long time. Every time I saw him, I would say, "When are you coming to the House of Lords?" I was worried that he might die before he arrived—but I am absolutely delighted to see him. I already know from his work in the diocese what a wonderful person he is, and what wonderful spiritual and practical leadership he displays. I was a lay canon for many years at the cathedral before the right reverend Prelate arrived, although there is no connection. But this must be the culmination of his aspirations. As a Lord spiritual, he

is of course involved in theology but also in the law—and it will not be beyond the wit of Peers in this noble House to think of ways in which the bassoon can be played and put to good effect on many occasions. I think we will be queueing for tickets.

When the right reverend Prelate spoke, he reminded me of why the Lords spiritual nearly always bring a particular contribution. They have served in both very prosperous and very poor areas. Long ago, it used to be the case that MPs served a form of apprenticeship; a Labour MP was a candidate in a very prosperous constituency, lost and then went to a safer seat, which was likely to be a more impoverished one. By contrast, a Conservative MP would serve their apprenticeship by starting in a poor area before then moving to a more prosperous one. What that meant was that we had individuals in the House who really understood about deprivation and disadvantage as well as prosperity and wealth. The right reverend Prelate said that there were food banks in Farnham, and I would entirely endorse that view—that the poverty and deprivation in a prosperous area can be as acute, or even more acute and painful, as in an area where there are many people on the free school list.

In my own case, I have had that exact story. I am a one-nation Tory. I believe in levelling-up, like my noble friend, and have spent many years working with the noble Baronesses, Lady Meacher and Lady Lister, and the noble Lord, Lord Field, at the Child Poverty Action Group, and then in Bethnal Green, Peckham and Brixton, before becoming the Member of Parliament for a very prosperous area, South West Surrey. When I left the Commons, my aim was to reconnect with that part of my own agenda, which I mind about. I agreed to become chancellor of the University of Hull 16 years ago. I was subsequently asked to be sheriff of the city of Kingston upon Hull by the very excellent Labour leader there—who just lost—and since then I have been seriously engaged in what we can do practically to reduce the gaps.

The noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, talked about health inequalities. In Hull, there is a major medical school which has had further investment and expansion, because if you train doctors in London, they want to stay in London, and if you train doctors in Hull, the chances are that they will stay in Hull, and the burden of morbidity and mortality in that part of the world is very great. The figure that the noble Lord used I use frequently: the seven-year gap between life expectancy in the Humber region and in prosperous areas of Surrey. The training of doctors, nurses, and other professions aligned to medicine of course creates jobs, but it also creates long-term investment which I hope will reduce inequalities.

In her excellent opening comments, my noble friend the Minister talked about enshrining in law the 12 levelling-up missions outlined in the White Paper and giving the Government a duty to report annually until 2030. I am a strong advocate for the government White Paper. This is like a PhD thesis. I congratulate not only the Secretary of State but Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England, who has had a major input. The detail, the analysis and the papers involved are formidable. Credit should also go to an earlier Levelling-up Minister, the noble Lord, Lord O'Neill, he of the

northern powerhouse. He had a lot of intellectual heft and thought invested in this. If you ask him what he thinks about the White Paper, he will say that it is about measuring the outcomes: it is the KPIs, it is the targets, it is making sure that we hold the Government's feet to the fire, and all our feet to the fire. As my noble friend said, it is not a wish list; it has to be an action programme.

The noble Lord, Lord O'Neill, said that the real issue is that levelling-up and devolution provide true accountability. The crucial ingredient now is full, unequivocal business engagement and commitment. We need a locally driven passion to do things differently, with a surge of private sector investment to seize those opportunities. That must be right and is very much what the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, said. I know her work and have shared much of it at London First, Business in the Community and elsewhere. She referred to the city of culture bid in Bradford; that in Hull was the most wonderful boost and catalyst for opportunity, employment, and well-being.

I am delighted to say that in the White Paper Hull is mentioned as a private sector-led partnership. It says that the Hull economy has great potential and that:

"Recent government announcements and initiatives such as the Humber Freeport and Net Zero, coupled with private sector investment, provide the opportunity and catalyst for the region to realise its potential. The Humber is playing a key role in energy. Through its natural geography and emerging cluster, the Humber will help to ensure that offshore wind, industrial decarbonisation, carbon capture, and other technologies will sustain key industries and create high quality jobs at scale for years to come."

I must pay tribute to the university for being such a catalyst for change by providing the evidence, the innovation and a business centre. But the real point is that in Hull they have created Opportunity Humber, which has already met and which is led by the chief executive of Reckitt, Laxman Narasimhan. There are people from Siemens Gamesa, ABP, Drax, National Grid Ventures, Ørsted, Equinor and Phillips 66 on the board of that body, along with the four local councils. It is about having local and global businesses putting in the investment and care that they have. Arup has prepared a first-rate report in detail on what needs to be done.

I recognise the huge difficulties of the time in which we live. We have war and inflation; we have the consequences of Covid and much else. However, this levelling-up agenda is one that resonates and which I believe we will deliver. In the foreword to the levelling-up White Paper, the Prime Minister said it was:

"A vision for the future that will see public spending on R&D increased in every part of the country; transport connectivity reaching London-like levels within and between all our towns and cities; faster broadband in every community; life expectancies rising; violent crime falling; schools improving; and private sector investment unleashed".

That is the economic, social and political challenge of our time. These are great words but I believe that with the White Paper and the measures in the Queen's Speech, we can deliver those targets with real commitment and engagement with the community and business by 2030.

6.21 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, it is a real pleasure to be debating this evening on the three issues which come so well together: levelling up, communities and

transport. I welcome the fact that we are to have maybe one or more Bills—I am not quite sure but it does not really matter, as we will have plenty of opportunities for debate. There are many other things, such as maritime EVs, buses and air, which have not been mentioned.

Before I move on to more transport things, I have one question on housing. When the Minister comes to reply, can he say a little about whether the right to buy from leaseholds is to be included? That was something which the Law Commission produced in an excellent report several years ago. It was promised after the first leasehold Bill and I am wondering whether there is to be another, because I have a lot of friends with an interest in that.

The other interesting thing which the Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, said in her introduction was about low-speed machines—I think she called them something like that—which seemed to be an excellent summary phrase for pedicabs, other e-bikes, scooters and the delivery of freight by bikes, electric or otherwise, some powered and some not. It may even cover what the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, said about wheels to work.

The noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, mentioned in her speech the connectivity of people. I am pleased to be a member of her Select Committee on the Built Environment. I can understand how both she and the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, were pretty angry about and critical of pedicabs and e-scooters. The solution is probably some form of education, persuasion and discipline to make people use these things and park them in places which are reasonably attractive, without getting rid of their usefulness. I have been trying out one or two scooters in London—legally, with my driving licence—and I invite the noble Baroness to join me one day on a scooter. My noble friend Lord Snape gave an invite to the Minister too. I can see she is shaking her head, but they are actually very good.

The great thing is that when you get off a train at a station or off a bus somewhere and you want to go a couple of hundred yards very quickly, you can just jump on these things and off you go. Of course, I do it on the road; I pretend I am a cyclist most of the time. I think the idea of having something like that for personal transport and connectivity is terribly important and I look forward to the debate on this and the Bill when it comes out.

The next thing that the noble Baroness mentioned in her introduction was the commitment to net-zero carbon. Well, they are good words but, to me, the Government's actions to date have, frankly, been the opposite. They seem to have reduced the need for road vehicles—cars and trucks—to comply with some reduction of carbon that should happen. Fuel duty has stayed the same for many years and rail fares keep shooting up with very little comment about the relative contribution to net zero.

On Great British Railways, the noble Baroness said that we are going to have a world-class transport network. Those are fine words but there may be some way to go yet. I need convincing of the benefits of Great British Railways. This all started with the Williams review in 2018, which is four years ago now. He produced

[LORD BERKELEY]

a very useful demand analysis which is still missing. Perhaps we will have a new one when the Government publish the Bill alongside it.

I go back to what must be 20 years ago when the Government created the Strategic Rail Authority. Ministers were fed up with making decisions on very small details on the railways so they created the authority that was going to run the railways, the track and the operations—ticket sales, buying, maintaining and operating rolling stock, et cetera—so that the rail sector was in charge and not subject to the then Department for Transport mismanagement. They created it but then a few years later, not very long after, the Strategic Rail Authority did something that the Ministers did not like. What did they do? They abolished it and went back to micromanagement.

I was involved in rail freight at that time. There were two or three years at the start and finish of the SRA where nothing happened at all. There was no investment and no changes. I hope that is not the intention this time. The whole problem at the moment is money, and because of that the Treasury is running every detail. I would like to know—I probably will not hear it this evening—where will this change?

Most people agree now that investment in the railways is primarily needed for local and regional services. This is why it is so sad that very little electrification has been announced in the last five years. I know there was a problem with the Great Western line but I think that has all been solved by the industry. Electrification is where we are going to get much greater quality of service and better frequency, et cetera, but we do not have it.

I hope that when we get some legislation—if we do—on what I suppose is called localism in the regions, they will be able to drive investment in the railways. Will local leaders be able to do this? At the moment, it is the opposite. I support the Mayor of Greater Manchester in suggesting that a station should be an underground station for HS2 at Manchester. However, whether I am right or wrong, the mayor and a lot of the other mayors around there want that underground station while the Government want a surface station. Nobody has produced any costs as to which is better. Certainly internationally, through-stations at capital cities are much more efficient and much less land hungry and probably cause much less disruption. That is happening at Stuttgart in Germany at the moment. My question, really, is: why are the Government insisting, against the wishes of so many people in the region, on having something that the people apparently do not want, although of course they would probably rather have it than nothing?

The other problem is that the integrated railway project has allocated £96 billion for the regional projects, but that will all be taken by HS2, so there is no more money for electrification. That is not good for the regions.

On the Minister's statement that this new structure of the railways will avoid spiralling costs, the only spiralling costs in the railways at the moment are for HS2, which the Government control. There is no electrification and we have nothing on fares; they keep on going up, but we do not have any new ideas on that. We have to encourage a system where people use the

railways, and I suspect that the people who run the railways, including from the commercial sector, are better at deciding that than civil servants.

When we finally get the new Bill, I hope we will see some evidence of demand and of the changes that have happened, and that we will have a little more transparency. At the moment, the only forecasts that I know of are connected with rail freight. There is a forecast of how much rail freight is needed north of Crewe on the way to Cumberland and beyond, compared with the HS2 and west coast main line. That forecast is commercially confidential. I hope that Ministers will publish that—it is only two years old—along with a lot of other information to support the view that Great British Railways will actually be worth the hassle.

6.32 pm

Baroness Boycott (CB): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, and I am very inspired by the image of his whizzing around London on his scooter. I will certainly join in.

I congratulate the Government on having a levelling-up Bill but, as others have said, this feels a little hollow at the moment. I would like to touch on the environment and women, but, first, I will touch on food. The term “food insecurity” gets bandied around at the moment—I think the confusion is whether we will get wheat from Ukraine or whether it is about people in an individual household. In fact, what food insecurity means when you are a human being in this country is not being able to afford breakfast for your kids, having to skip dinner, or having to go to the supermarket and buy a pizza that is full of not good calories for £1 because that is part of your daily budget. It means being hungry.

As we have all seen from the reports from the Food Foundation this week, food insecurity rates are now double the pre-pandemic levels. Particularly shocking is the level among those on universal credit: 47.7% of households on universal credit have experienced some kind of hunger, have needed to miss a meal or have had to choose to buy cheap and unhealthy food. That £20 that we took off universal credit might not mean a great deal to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—it is like a tip at a London restaurant—but for someone on a budget it means absolutely everything.

I have been working in food policy—what I really mean is food poverty; I am now the chair of Feeding Britain, among other things—for almost 15 years now. Quite frankly, from what I know, it has never been so bad. In 2008, when I first started working for the now Prime Minister as chair of the London Food Board, I asked him to come to a food bank with me. I asked several times; he never came. I think there is a sense that if you keep these things out of mind, you can sort of keep them out of your policy. What the levelling-up strategy comes up with is all fine and dandy, but it does not actually address the here and now, which is a massive discrepancy.

If people were desperate back in 2008, today is a whole new ballgame. Of the many facts that I have learned in the past few weeks, the fact that people will now not take vegetables from food banks because they cannot afford to cook them is probably the saddest thing. As my noble friend Lord Kakkar said in his

excellent speech about health disparities, we now have an enormous gap not just in relation to the age that you live to but in relation to the years in which you live a healthy life. That unhealthy life is not just a nightmare for the person; it is actually a nightmare for us. It is short-sighted and just plain stupid. It costs the NHS, it costs the taxpayer, and it costs the lot of us to have a generation of people—small fat kids, quite frankly, at the moment—who will be a burden on society and a misery to themselves. We can change this.

Poor diet, as I have said, is now associated with more illnesses than any other factor. If there is to be a serious levelling-up attempt, it must start by levelling up the food system. I had four questions for the Minister, but now I have a fifth. Will she accept the invitation to come with Feeding Britain to see some of our foodbanks, the invitation that the Prime Minister turned down all those years ago?

First, will the Government agree to increase the amount of money in people's pockets by keeping working-age benefits genuinely in line with inflation? Will the Government provide a safety net for kids by expanding free school meals, breakfast provision and Healthy Start, so that children can be protected from both hunger and lousy food? Will the Government explore tax and subsidy regimes to balance the price of healthy food, which at the moment is much more expensive? Will the Government commit to a new good food Bill? As someone who worked with Henry Dimbleby on the food plan, I am very disappointed that there is no mention at all of this in the whole of the Queen's Speech. It makes me think that when we get the White Paper in the next few months, it will be weak rather than robust.

I turn now to the environment. This Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill must address net-zero policies. The levelling-up paper does, I admit, recognise that the transition to net zero will have lasting effects on virtually every aspect of the economy, including jobs and skills, but the Government are not prioritising net zero as an integral part of their levelling-up agenda. Indeed, there is actually no mention of net zero in the 12 levelling-up missions, despite the fact that it could be easily woven into most of them. We can put it in skills, transport, pride in community, and education. I could go on. All those actions would be in line with our goals.

One key area where levelling up and net zero can align is in relation to fuel poverty. Making our notoriously draughty and very poorly built homes much more energy efficient—we have some of the leakiest homes in Europe—would help to reduce bills and reduce emissions. The levelling-up paper does address the quality of homes, but what about the retrofitting of the ones we are already in? We know that this is costly—it costs a fortune—but the cost of inaction is way more than the cost of action.

It is worth saying and repeating, because it has not been said so far today, that we are in a climate emergency, and the signals are coming from all sides. Just on Monday, the Met Office said that there was a strong likelihood that at least one of the next five years would exceed the 1.5-degree level that the world is struggling to achieve. There are crop failures. We will face proper food insecurity. We have to get our head out of the

sand and into the solution. Lots of Bills have been announced that could be levers to address these problems, but they are piecemeal. Why can we not have a proper overarching strategy?

I am very disappointed to see that there are an increasing number of Conservative MPs—okay, a minority—who are questioning the Government's continued commitment to net zero, a commitment which I truly honour and value. I am also disappointed by the Government's recent decision to agree to a new licensing round for oil and gas projects. We will not level up if we go backwards. Polls show that voters, including a huge number of Conservatives, do not want to see this. History will judge all of us by how we respond to this challenge. We are meant to be at 50% carbon emissions by 2030, so everything that is done now and in this Session that is set out in this Queen's Speech will add to this. It is crucial.

To spend parliamentary time arguing about how we can criminalise people for protesting is, I suggest, not a good use of that time. I want to hark back to just over 100 years ago. The suffragettes broke every single window within half a mile of Trafalgar Square to get their point across. Marjorie Hume locked herself on to one of the statues in St Stephen's Hall. We do not look back on them as criminals; we look back on them as heroines. Indeed, they are the reason that all these women are here today.

It makes me very sad to see that one of the Government's ideas to save money is that we should water down the quality of nurseries. Fifty years ago next month, I co-founded *Spare Rib*. I cannot believe that we are still in a society where women cannot get childcare. Again, it is a lousy use of taxpayers' money not to do it; we could have a more productive and more equal society.

Those are my three contributions to levelling up. I look forward to the Minister's response.

6.40 pm

Lord Borwick (Con): My Lords, I will use my time today to raise the issue of guaranteed universal access to taxis for disabled people. First, I declare my interests in the taxi industry as the holder of a London taxi proprietor's licence, the owner of a licensed London taxi and the employer of a London taxi driver. My experience of many years in the London taxi industry is as a manufacturer, distributor, financier, developer and driver.

The Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act, which as a Private Member's Bill I had the privilege of proposing in this House a few months ago, has made it easier to stop the discrimination that still occurs. In a previous debate, the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, mentioned how, late at night and with an almost flat battery on her wheelchair, she once faced a rank of about 10 taxis out of which only two were accessible. Both drivers discriminated against her even though they had an accessible taxi. This is clearly unacceptable.

As a result of that Bill, which has just passed, such discrimination will be confirmed as illegal. Everybody else might have believed it already was—but never mind, it is always good to make a position clear. However, it took me back to the then Disability Discrimination

[LORD BORWICK]

Bill's Committee stage debate in this House, in which the Minister, the late Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, said:

"It is therefore the Government's clear intention, as part of the package of measures covering all forms of domestic, land-based public transport, to bring before this Chamber, in the course of our deliberations on this Bill, provisions to require that, from days to be determined, taxis newly licensed must, as a condition of licence, be accessible to all disabled people, including those who use wheelchairs."—[*Official Report*, 15/6/1995; col. 2035.]

The problem is that he said this would happen from a date to be determined—but the Government never determined which date. In 27 years, no Government have found the time to propose the statutory instruments required. In the intermediate time since 1995, all the political parties have had time in government, or as part of a Government. The successes and failures since that time can be shared among all, other than the Greens—although I am sure they would have helped had they had the chance.

It seems reasonable for me to ask my noble friend the Minister quite how determined Her Majesty's Government are to fulfil the obligation announced by Lord Mackay, and over what period of time. The meter is running, so to speak—27 years is on the clock so far—and the people who have been and will be paying for this are those people who are disabled and who might reasonably have expected transport. All Governments since 1995 have achieved great things. Buses are now 100% accessible. On trains, accessibility has significantly improved. Even significant portions of the Underground have been adapted. Access to places of work and entertainment, as well as houses, has been granted. Even in this place, the Palace of Westminster, incredible strides forward have been taken. Things are not perfect, but they are notably better—although it might be said that the most striking place in the Palace of Westminster that has not been adapted is the Throne.

What makes it a shame is that UK taxis, which might have been the first accessible public transport in the world, are not yet 100% accessible. It is still a lottery as to whether the disabled person will gain the services of an accessible vehicle. The disabled person will live in an accessible house or flat and work in an accessible office or shop—but they face a matter of chance as to whether they can get there.

The subject of this debate is not just transport but levelling up and communities. The Government have said that where there are features that make London more successful, they should be duplicated in other parts of the country. Is this not a perfect example of a regulation where levelling up should be applied? I fear that if the Government do not make it mandatory that taxis need be wheelchair and disability accessible within some sort of timeframe, they are condoning a situation in which disabled people in London have more rights and opportunities than those outside London, which is the opposite of levelling up. We want to bring communities together.

My noble friend the Minister may well tell us that there is a consultation open at present on the regulation of taxis, to be considered by the Government, and she might reasonably ask for this consultation period to finish before she announces her policy. If she will

forgive me, I wonder whether there is any reason for further consultation on this issue. The point is that the policy has already been announced by her great Conservative predecessors, and that policy has been supported by the other parties. The only thing that has not occurred is action. I have been told that the policy is unchanged and that taxis will eventually be accessible—but when?

Although I am very grateful to the Minister for her time recently, may I request a further meeting on this, with her advisers present this time and in person? I would really like to help bring this change about. It is very positive that the Bill—now Act—I was part of has made it illegal to discriminate against a disabled person if a taxi is able to accommodate them. However, we really must go further, as our Conservative predecessor wished to all those decades before, and make taxis

"as a condition of licence, be accessible to all disabled people, including those who use wheelchairs."—[*Official Report*, 15/6/1995; col. 2035.]

We really must make this change.

6.47 pm

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, and to welcome the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford, particularly following his very reflective contribution. I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate on levelling up, housing and communities and refer to my entry in the register of interests. These policy issues need to be underpinned by a determined political imperative to reduce geographical inequalities right across the UK—I include Northern Ireland in that—and to promote social justice and fairness for all.

I question whether that political imperative to address geographical inequalities exists in the Queen's Speech when so many communities have had to endure rising costs of living in terms of food, energy and higher levels of inflation. Such higher prices have meant that they have had to do without certain essential commodities such as food and have little money to spare for rent. In fact, there are now greater proportions of our population reliant on food banks, including those who are in work.

Undoubtedly, this Queen's Speech will be benchmarked on its ability, via the Treasury and the DWP, to put money into people's pockets, with better economic measures to uplift our economy so that communities, those in receipt of benefits and the working poor can become more resilient. The verdict on this is still very much out; the public will have their say through their actions and obviously at the ballot box. The cost of living crisis and higher inflation have compromised the position of many people so that they are in fuel and food poverty—a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott. These were constant themes as I knocked on doors and talked to people during canvasses for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections over the last number of weeks.

In that regard, I would like to look at Northern Ireland in terms of levelling up. I acknowledge and note that the Government's document says that there is £49 million for 11 projects, £1 billion for farmers, and £9.3 million for fisheries. But to implement all that, we need an Executive and an Assembly. I see the

noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, in the Chamber. He was the first Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly 20 years ago, and I am sure he would agree that we want to see this Government ensuring that Sinn Féin and the DUP form a Government in the short term to deal with the cost of living crisis, because that will help with levelling up.

Does this Queen's Speech mean ensuring that the protocol, with mitigations, continues to avail Northern Ireland of the opportunities of trading in both markets? That will provide necessary jobs. In the Queen's Speech, the Government refer to prioritising

"support for the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and its institutions, including through legislation to address the legacy of the past."

I have several questions for the Minister. I appreciate that this is not within his brief, but I would like it if he could get the answers from the Foreign Office and the Northern Ireland Office. How will this Queen's Speech protect the Good Friday agreement? When will negotiations resume with the European Commission on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland? What discussions have and will take place with the Irish Government, as co-guarantors, to support the Good Friday agreement? All this is directly linked to levelling up, ensuring that all the citizens of Northern Ireland have access to fairness and equality. That can be provided only by the restoration of a Government, an Executive, an Assembly and all the other institutions.

We would like to know what truth there is—and what the evidence base is—in yesterday's *Times* article suggesting that the Foreign Secretary is ready to tear up the protocol and try to introduce what seems very much like Part 5 of the internal market Bill again through another piece of legislation. Fortunately, this mounting speculation has not materialised in this Queen's Speech, but there is so much talk about it, with references made by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Quite honestly, we in Northern Ireland are sick, sore and tired of this Government placing all of us on the sacrificial altar of Brexit. All this comes out of Brexit, and it does nothing for building reconciliation and good community relations. The one thing we all want is for our own Government—the Northern Ireland Executive—to be established ASAP. We want to know when that is going to happen because it will provide us with all the levelling-up measures that are possible. I urge the Government to use their good offices to do that, working alongside the Irish Government. It is only through the establishment of a Government that levelling up will take place in Northern Ireland and that we will see fairness, equality and a means of addressing the cost of living crisis, providing social and economic equality for all by working with Ministers in Whitehall. That is an urgent requirement.

6.54 pm

Lord Carrington (CB): My Lords, this has been a most wide-ranging and interesting debate, and it is a great pleasure to follow so many knowledgeable people, including the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. I declare my interests as a farmer and landowner as set out in the register. I too welcome the intention to bring forward legislation to assist in the levelling-up agenda, which was clearly signalled in the February White Paper. However, as we heard from

the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans, there was precious little in the paper on the challenges and opportunities faced by rural areas; it had a distinctly urban focus.

I am proud to have been a member of the APPG on Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse, which, as mentioned by its co-chair, the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, released a report in April entitled *Levelling up the Rural Economy: An Inquiry into Rural Productivity*. I shall briefly concentrate on just a few of the issues raised, and look forward to a response from the Minister on how the Government see those challenges and their likely solution.

First, there are the perceived drawbacks of a planning system that is under-resourced and fails to consider the need for economic growth in rural areas. In particular, there is the need to recognise the importance of affordable housing in smaller local communities, rather than concentrating on larger developments. Employment and housing are essential for a thriving local community, or the young, who cannot afford expensive and often unsuitable existing housing, will move away and local businesses will suffer. The National Planning Policy Framework excludes small housing developments in the countryside, affordable or not, and sites of redundant farm buildings do not meet the definition of brownfield sites, which means that farmers and other rural businesses are unnecessarily constrained in their attempts to diversify into other activities. This is extraordinary when, following the steady reduction of the basic payment to farmers and the introduction of ELM schemes, which are not designed to compensate for the lost basic payment, the farmer is being encouraged to diversify. Depending on his diversification, how can he achieve that if he cannot convert his farm buildings if suitable? This indicates the need to redefine permitted development rights. To increase the efficiency of the planning process, the APPG report calls for a training budget specifically for planning officers on rural issues, with additional officers.

Secondly, there is the need to amend and clarify the taxation of appropriate rural businesses, as mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, to reflect the changing economic environment following the introduction of ELMS and the consequent increase in diversification away from farming. There is a strong argument to recognise a specific rural business unit as one unit for taxation purposes. Currently, these businesses must separate their activities into different silos, although they may be commonly owned, managed and often use the same assets as each other. With a rural business unit, activities such as farming, a riding school, a farm shop and cottage letting could report as one entity. Associated with this is the need to clarify the applicability of conditional exemptions, such as agricultural property relief and business property relief. This could be used to ensure that landowners are actively encouraged to build affordable housing and housing for social rent in those villages. Similarly, to incentivise activities that mitigate climate change, such as solar schemes, environmental schemes and carbon sequestration, the applicability of those reliefs needs clarification.

Thirdly, there is the requirement on the private rented sector that by 2025 all properties have an energy performance certificate of band C or higher.

[LORD CARRINGTON]

The Government appear to have a one-size-fits-all solution to changing the way we heat our homes. We are currently trying to replace gas and oil-fired boilers. However, the preferred and uniquely subsidised solution is to replace these with heat pumps. In much of the countryside, which is not on the gas grid and where houses may be of older and traditional construction without cavity walls, or may be listed, the heat pump solution can often be much more expensive than looking at other technologies, such as hydrogen or renewable liquefied gas. This means that many rural properties will be unable to reach bands B and C.

Incidentally, the measurement of these bands is open to dispute, as the carbon stored in older buildings is not considered, nor the carbon generated by the construction of new buildings. Government funding should be allocated to technologies other than heat pumps, and there should be clear recognition that other solutions and exemptions will be required.

Finally, I highlight the possibility of the abolition of Section 21, which raises many genuine concerns that will be debated. Among them is the threat to prevent landlords evicting a tenant at the end of the tenancy period to which the renter has voluntarily agreed when signing the lease. Why would a landlord offer a fixed-term, short lease if the term was effectively in perpetuity? Assuming the landlord has no other use for the property and the tenant has been paying his rent, there is little likelihood that the tenancy would not be renewed, but there are many justifiable circumstances in which the landlord may require that property for another occupant, let alone for himself or if he wishes to sell the property—for instance, where the property needs to be occupied by an essential worker in the business or activity to which that property may be connected. An obvious example of this in the rural sector would be on a livestock farm, where proximity to the job is essential, but it could also apply to nurses, teachers and the police. Limited affordable housing stock in rural areas makes alternative accommodation difficult for some occupations. By all means, let us create longer minimum-term tenancies, but flexibility remains important, or the private rented sector will decline.

There are many other issues relating to levelling up in areas that have already been covered by other noble Lords. However, the overwhelming conclusion that one comes to from reading this report is that some form of cross-government co-ordination, as referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, is essential so that all these opportunities and issues are properly addressed.

7.03 pm

Baroness Foster of Oxtou (Con): My Lords, it is an honour to take part in this debate on the humble Address and, in addition, to welcome the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford to this House today. I also welcome the proposal outlined yesterday, but there is still much to do.

Domestic and international travel are integral to the success, or not, of the British economy. Hundreds of billions of pounds in revenue are generated by the free movement of people and goods, not just for the

business and manufacturing sectors but for tourism. The pandemic literally decimated both for nigh on two years, and it makes the recovery that much more important when making decisions about what we do next.

Last night, I attended a dinner in London hosted by the Airport Operators Association. It was attended by more than 650 guests representing all UK airports and airlines, international airlines from across the globe, infrastructure companies dealing with navigation, IT and power, and of course the aerospace manufacturers. There were also the regulators, such as the CAA and NATS, along with all the representatives of the tourism sector.

It was clear that, in many cases, there is still a long way to go to get back to profit and to ensure that operational challenges can be addressed post Covid. Thousands of people were laid off and many companies—SMEs—went under, so it is vital that we as a Government do not create unnecessary bureaucracy and unworkable rules. Many employers are crying out to employ staff across the sectors and supply chains, but there is still a laissez-faire approach to working from home in too many quarters. You cannot run industries in this way. In addition, you do not always need graduates. There needs to be a much more robust and positive message from Government regarding the great careers and opportunities out there in the travel and tourism sectors. Clearly, apprenticeships are one way to do this, but we also have to look at the qualifications and training needed for the tourism sector, which are currently not being delivered by our education system.

This brings me to the lack of can-do, because it is also about passengers and customers. Despite restrictions being lifted, it is wholly unacceptable that the Passport Office, for example, is not delivering. This is not because people are panicking and sending in their passports, as I was informed; many are trying to renew their passports online and first-time applicants are also being badly affected. Along with position at the DVLA, this is wholly unacceptable.

This brings me to the responsibility on airlines and airports, some of which are leaving passengers standing outside for two or three hours, apparently because they do not have enough security or check-in staff. People spend their hard-earned cash to travel, and this third-world treatment is disgraceful and unacceptable. I do not know about noble Lords, but I am sick and tired of hearing Covid being used as an excuse to stop or delay practically everything we do or need to do, not to deliver on time or not to deliver the first-class customer service we pay for and should now be experiencing again.

The travel and tourism industry of the United Kingdom had a great reputation—83% of people fly in and out, along with millions of tonnes of freight, every year. This contributes to a huge underpinning of the entire supply chain, which creates and sustains 4 million jobs. But our world-class industries are being tainted. It is time for everyone in the public and private sectors to raise their game.

Two examples should be looked at again. School and youth groups are a £32.2 billion industry that has been decimated due to the UK no longer accepting ID cards as a form of entry from abroad. We should

also consider reintroducing the VAT reclaim system, which was abolished in 2021. As one of the shopping capitals of the world, we are the only European country not to offer tax-free shopping—a £1.3 billion net benefit to the Treasury. These are just two examples where we need to look again.

The Government's responsibility is now to crack on. The incessant negative messages on travel, across the piece, are doing as much damage as Covid. Extinction Rebellion and others are preaching one thing, only to turn up at an airport or stay in a hotel as often as anyone else. Hypocrisy rules, I am afraid. Positive messages and actions are needed. We need to get back to normal, so that our economy can benefit from the successes that the travel and tourism industry can deliver.

7.09 pm

Lord Truscott (Non-Aff): I commend the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford on his excellent and thoughtful speech.

My Lords, I am very disappointed that the proposed renters reform Bill and the second stage of leasehold reform were not directly mentioned in the gracious Speech. In saying this, I declare an interest as a long-standing leaseholder and landlord. As the Minister said earlier in the debate, a renters reform Bill will nevertheless be brought forward in the current parliamentary Session, although the second stage of leasehold reform will seemingly not, despite talk of it being dealt with in the next parliamentary Session.

I hope that the leasehold reform Bill will not be kicked into the long grass and effectively dropped. I ask Her Majesty's Government to think again and bring forward the second stage of leasehold reform in this Session as a matter of urgency. I request that the Minister clarifies the situation and treats these issues with the importance that they deserve. I commend Her Majesty's Government and the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Greenhalgh, on passing the ground rent Act in the last Session.

On the proposed renters reform Bill, I support the abolition of no-fault evictions by removing Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, which has often been seen as unfair and contributes to tenants' insecurity of tenure. However, I add three provisos. First, landlords should always be able to seek possession in the case of rent arrears. Most landlords own only one or two properties and are not Rachman-style slum landlords. They rely on rental income to pay the mortgage—if they have one—maintenance costs and service charges, and often to supplement increasingly inadequate state pensions. Secondly, many landlords are accidental landlords, or landlords for just a period of their lives. If they personally need to reoccupy their homes, they should be able to do so. The noble Lord, Lord Carrington, referred to some of these issues. Thirdly, fair rent reviews must be built into the system. Costs go up for landlords as well as tenants, and rents should at least be able to rise over time in line with the consumer price index or another appropriate measure.

It is regrettable that, in addition to a database for rogue landlords and property agents, Her Majesty's Government are not legislating to regulate property management agents. Estate agents are legally regulated, so I see no reason why equally important property

management agents are not. The 2019 recommendations of the Regulation of Property Agents working group have been ignored. Property management agents tend to fall into three categories: those managed by right to manage companies that are professional and competent; those managed by RTM companies that are wholly unprofessional and incompetent; and professional property management companies whose sole purpose seems to be to act on behalf of the freeholder and burden leaseholders with excessive costs, including extortionate commissions and overly expensive works.

The second stage of leasehold reform is well overdue. Our feudal leasehold system is precisely that: feudal, outdated and unique to England and Wales. Abuses of the system have been well documented in this House and elsewhere. The Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and the leasehold and commonhold reform APPG—I am a member of the latter—have done much valuable work on the issues facing leaseholders, of whom there are some 4.6 million in the country.

I welcome the Law Commission's papers on exercising the right to manage and on leasehold home ownership. For those wishing to extend the length of their leases to ensure long-term tenure and preserve value, the current system is an arbitrary nightmare. As a surveyor told me recently, freeholders think of a lease extension valuation figure and double it. Surveyors and valuers then receive commission based on how much they can negotiate the lease extension figure down from an initial valuation that has no relation to market value. Again, all parties benefit apart from the leaseholder.

Abolition of so-called "marriage value" would be welcome. The proposed online calculator would also be of benefit. At last, leaseholders will be aware of the potential cost before embarking on the exercise. Her Majesty's Government should firmly reject the specious argument made by some hedge funds that leasehold reform will imperil their human rights as property owners. If the law has to be changed to nullify this argument, it should be. In short, I look forward to the Government pressing ahead as soon as possible with legislation in this area that will offer real hope to renters and leaseholders.

7.14 pm

Lord Haselhurst (Con): My Lords, I join other colleagues in congratulating the right reverend Prelate on his maiden speech, which was very impressive. It must be some 70 years ago now that, in post-war Britain, I first identified myself as a Conservative supporter on account of the emphasis that was being given at that time to home ownership. It was a very popular policy.

We have to ask ourselves how it has come about that successive Governments have run into considerable local resistance to their plans to build more houses. The economic activity in this country has been uneven. The south has outstripped what has happened in other parts of the country as older industries have declined. The pull factor of our capital city is very powerful, and we would not wish that to be diminished, but we have not yet succeeded in establishing one or more of our great provincial cities as a major alternative port of entry into this country, whether for business or tourism. Development has acquired a bad name—in too many places, deservedly. Promises have been made

[LORD HASELHURST]

that could not be fulfilled, and standards have been set and then compromised. I represented the constituency of Saffron Walden for 40 years, and at the end of it I felt deeply troubled that the housing waiting list for a local authority home was as long in 2017 as it had been for most of the time since 1977.

All this has persuaded me to look again at the recommendations that were made by Lord Redcliffe-Maud about the organisation of local government and published in 1969. He recommended unitary authorities across the board. I have to say that, being the third person to speak who is a member of the Built Environment Committee, I have come to the conclusion that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a larger local housing authority, or combined authorities, would be more likely to have the resources and expertise to promote building back better, and to ensure that space and place are in the design of new communities and that they have the strength to uphold guarantees of commensurate infrastructure.

Transport is one of the most potent elements in the levelling-up process. We are already aware, for example, that the promise of HS2 is having a positive effect in Birmingham and the West Midlands. The prospect of the next phase of that railway making Manchester only 63 minutes from London will also be a game-changer. Once it is recognised that the journey time between home and work can be so dramatically slashed, the distance between home and place of work becomes less of a limiting factor when local authorities are planning the construction of new homes.

The second sentence of the gracious Speech announces the Government's intention to

"level up opportunity in all parts of the country."

I take heart from that, and I end on a note of special pleading, which is relative to my interests as recorded in the register. In 1985, Margaret Thatcher's Government decided that Stansted should be the site of London's third airport, although 20 years earlier a previous Government had accepted the advice from Dr Beeching to reduce that railway line from Liverpool Street that serves the airport now. He recommended that its capacity be reduced from four tracks to two. Could we please have them back?

7.19 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, I welcomed the Minister's opening remarks when she referred to meeting the transport challenges head on. From my perspective, however, the emphasis on people, although undeniably important, misses the crucial category of freight and logistics—the engine room of economic development. This serves as a starter for my remarks this evening.

While the signing of free trade agreements by the Department for International Trade has been centre stage, a challenge is the ability of other departments to ensure that enablers are ready to exploit them. By their sheer nature, logistics and supply chains must be an integrated system of road, rail, maritime and air. In the UK, the capacity of this system is severely limited, meaning that when one element of the system is restricted, such as through a port closure or the routine maintenance of a runway, it puts undue stress on the rest of the system. There is no cross-modal resilience

in the system to provide relief should one part of the system go down. Capacity for freight and logistics in the UK is challenged whether it is on the road, in the air or at sea. To address these freight-related challenges, the Department for Transport is working on the future of freight strategy and has canvassed industry trade associations for feedback. The plan, as I understand it, is to set out how government will work with freight and logistics companies to

"achieve a cost efficient, reliable, resilient and environmentally sustainable freight transport sector".

The future of freight strategy is a huge piece of work and the DfT has an almighty challenge to adapt to the demands of the future. My fear is that currently government, the industry and those who represent it have a propensity to work in silos, with not enough consideration of the need to view freight and logistics infrastructure holistically. There is therefore an urgent need for Parliament to join the discussion and work to ensure that the national interest is well thought through and implemented.

The industry is made up of five categories—aviation, including airports; maritime, including ports; rail; road, including both heavy goods vehicles and vans; and land, which encompasses buildings and space, to which I add warehousing—with a sevenfold set of priorities: raising the status of freight; optimising infrastructure; supporting the transition to net zero; investing in people and skills; resilience; planning and levelling up; and data and technology, with a chance to bring the digitalisation of cross-border trade and including the Government's flagship electronic trade documents Bill.

Taking each of the categories briefly in turn, I shall start with aviation. The UK has been facing capacity constraints at key airports for a number of years. This is most prevalent at London Heathrow, which has seen its expansion plans delayed for a number of years by the pandemic. This severe lack of capacity will undermine the Government's aspirations to grow global trade and boost exports. Cargo capacity must therefore be factored into strategic growth plans, with existing facilities upgraded and practical consideration of general airport capacity, with landing and take-off slot availability for cargo at London airports and night flights viewed as critical. I have viewed this at first hand courtesy of DHL, as has the Minister.

On maritime, ports around the country are a key asset to the UK in attracting trade and jobs to the country and enabling the green economy. It is essential that these assets are supported now and invested in appropriately in order that the UK reaps the rewards in the long term. The Government should work with ports to ensure that regulatory frameworks support high levels of private sector investment. With the UK being an island nation and with 90% of everything we buy arriving by sea, the maritime supply chain is critical for our global competitiveness. The UK has excellent port capacity and facilities; however, those are not matched by inland road and rail connections. The industry is campaigning for world-class multi-modal port connections to ensure that goods move seamlessly and quickly to and from overseas markets.

The UK also has the capacity for goods to be moved by coastal shipping and inland waterways, which already account for 15% of UK domestic freight.

With more effective government support to promote modal shift and policy frameworks that protect and expand our inland waterway freight infrastructure, these modes could grow and reduce pressure on our congested roads. Noble Lords should add to the mix that the Port of Tyne, to which I am travelling later this month, is playing a leading role on behalf of the industry in decarbonising and digitising the supply chain.

Rail freight offers a more sustainable low-carbon option to move freight, but currently rail accounts for only 9% of domestic freight. The demand is there; rail freight is growing again following a period of decline, and Network Rail studies indicate that there could be over 30% growth over the next 15 years if enough capacity were provided. To facilitate this, we need more investment in the strategic freight network and more electrification. Freight also needs better access to existing capacity, including a shift from passenger to freight where freight would be a better use of the network.

To ensure that our goods can be delivered by road, the Government must support the sector and the urgent delivery of the 1,411 overnight lorry parking spaces identified as being needed immediately in England in the 2017 *National Survey of Lorry Parking*. The number of spaces must be increased, alongside improved security and standards for lorry parking at motorway service areas to be prescribed in the revised government guidance. Spending for road infrastructure needs to continue to be well-planned and stable over the long term. Government projections show road traffic continuing to grow, so this must be reflected in road investment strategy 3 and beyond. The UK's transport infrastructure and services are not currently world leading, so investment must continue to help improve the UK's road network.

Finally, the planning system has been a cause of major frustration for logistics for many years across all modes. Problems include the loss of freight infrastructure to housing development, the slow process for gaining approval for new freight infrastructure and additional restrictions on freight operations where housing is permitted near existing facilities. Logistics land must be safeguarded.

In addition, the planning system must permit the expansion of logistics infrastructure, provided that clear criteria are met. Too often, logistics infrastructure with clear economic benefits which can be delivered within environmental constraints has been delayed due to overly lengthy local planning rules and procedures. I note with interest the reference in the Queen's Speech to how

"The planning system will be reformed to give residents more involvement in local development."

That can be taken in two ways and might cause conflict between economic development and housing agendas.

Most immediate is the need for Freight Council reform. It is a body currently made up of DfT officials and trade association representatives. Proposals call for greater industry representation on the Freight Council. The DfT should be encouraged to drive a co-ordinated government approach to the freight and logistics sector by establishing a cross-modal logistics directorate within the department, and to bring improved understanding

of the freight system to government operations by exploring the use of secondment opportunities between business and government.

There is much to do, and time does not permit me to advance a more strategic comment. However, I have welcomed this opportunity to flag up an essential area requiring urgent consideration and hope that I have made the case that this is a legitimate sector of the economy which should have proper parliamentary scrutiny. More immediately, I am honoured to be launching a new wing and course at Boston College next week dedicated to investing in people and skills for freight and logistics. The college has rightly recognised the importance of the industry and is to be commended for running with this particular ball.

7.29 pm

Baroness Pinnock (LD): My Lords, I remind the House of my interests as vice-president of the Local Government Association and as a member of Kirklees Council. This has been a wide-ranging and thoughtful debate on the gracious Speech. However, some themes are emerging in contributions from across the House. One of these is the lack of ambition from the Government, despite their considerable majority in the other place. There is also a shared concern that the enormous challenges facing our country are being largely ignored. For instance, on an effective response to the challenges of climate change, to include actions to be taken by local government, there is nothing. Action to address the cost-of-living crisis that is hitting hardest those who are only just managing is absent. A targeted approach to meet the specific needs of people in rural communities—as described by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans—who are finding crucial services withdrawn is absent. It leads me to think that the plan that the Government have laid out in the gracious Speech that seeks to improve the lot of our communities, and transport and housing, appears to be lacking a strategic framework. If there is one, I hope that the Minister will be able to spell it out for us.

The first question to ask about the levelling-up Bill is whether its content will address the desperate needs laid out in the White Paper. It is positive that progress will be measured across a wide range of metrics and that it is more people-focused, as many noble Lords across the House have mentioned. The noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, raised the very interesting prospect of health needs being met much more locally, by using empty high street shops for instance. The noble Baroness, Lady Lister, and my noble friend Lady Benjamin were passionate about the need to have child poverty at the very heart of any levelling-up agenda, and of course my noble friend Lord Shipley eloquently expounded on the whole range of needs to be met in the levelling-up Bill.

However, it seems to me that the measures proposed so far are very thin gruel indeed. Let us just remember that successive Governments have tried before. They have called it different things, of course. In my own part of West Yorkshire, we have had city challenge, single regeneration budgets 1 and 2, neighbourhood renewal, and the regional development agency. Despite these endeavours, many of these communities that I serve are still in need of, in the Government's phrase,

[BARONESS PINNOCK]

levelling up. It is a pity that the levelling-up agenda does not include levelling up local government funding. That might go a long way to levelling up our communities. My own local authority has £100 million less every year to spend on its communities. It is not surprising that inequality is growing.

I know from experience that achieving sustainable lasting change requires a consistent and holistic approach over several Parliaments. Pepper-potting competitive funding bids to clear up derelict sites in towns achieves just that. What it does not achieve is a step-change improvement to the daily lives of the people who live there.

There is a general acknowledgement that tackling climate change requires a greater use of public transport. The transport Bill has much to say on rail travel, as many noble Lords who know much more about it than I do have expounded. But on the same day that we had the announcement of the transport Bill, including improvements to rail services, local rail services to Leeds are being significantly reduced. The Government need to think more about local rail services and spend more on them than they currently do, as they are absolutely essential for local economies.

That brings me to buses. “Bus Back Better” seems to have been an empty slogan. There was no reference that I heard in the opening remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, to improving buses, yet reducing emissions from transport will not occur unless progress is made in bus use. Can the Minister let us know what levers the Government intend to use to ensure that bus travel is more reliable and more available to all our communities, rural and urban, and that the regions of England enjoy the same bus model as London does—in other words, for it to be under local control?

One of the best ways to revitalise our town centres is to take radical action on business rates. Several reports and studies have pointed to that, as the noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, said. However, yet again that particular nettle has not been grasped. The non-domestic rates Bill includes some worthy but not fundamental reforms. Online retailers such as Amazon have a grossly unfair advantage over town centre traders. I will repeat the example I have used previously: for instance, Amazon will pay on its warehouse near Doncaster £45 per square metre in business rates, whereas a small shop in a small town centre will pay around £250 per square metre. When is levelling up, and a level playing field, to be created for our town centre traders?

Equally, the housing Bill misses the main issues. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about the need for a long-term strategy on housing. There are over 1 million families on social housing waiting lists, yet there is no plan to increase dramatically that provision, as my noble friend Lord Shipley described so eloquently. The type of housing built at the moment is determined largely by developers and therefore often fails to meet local needs. The developers’ motive is profit, of course, but that does not meet what many need and want. For instance, older people may wish to downsize or move into extra-care housing. How do the Government intend to meet housing need rather than allow developers to determine what is built?

Well-insulated homes cut CO₂ emissions and energy costs. Where is the plan to insulate homes? Fifteen years ago my own council—under Liberal Democrat leadership, I have to say—enabled every house, regardless of tenure, to have access to free loft and cavity wall insulation. That was 15 years ago and nearly 100,000 properties were treated in that way. Why can the Government not do that?

The opportunity for full-scale leasehold reform has been promised by the Government, but where is it? The Bill provides some welcome protections for leaseholders and I welcome banning the abuse of ground rents, but there is no abolition of leasehold or introduction of commonhold reform.

There is much that is missing in the programme for communities, but what is amazing is that the words “local government” appear nowhere. Local leadership is crucial to tackling climate change, local transport, housing and planning, yet it is ignored. Town and parish councillors, for instance, will be wondering why they give of their time and expertise when controversial planning decisions in their streets seem now to be devolved to residents, who are not accountable to the public for any decisions they take. There is much that needs change, and the sad fact is that this programme fails to meet the challenge. I look forward to the Minister’s response and to debating and amending the legislation when it is brought to this House.

7.40 pm

Baroness Hayman of Ullock (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her very thorough introduction to what has been a wide-ranging and very interesting debate. A highlight for me was the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford. I very much look forward to his future contributions in your Lordships’ House.

We very much welcome the fact that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill is included in the Queen’s Speech, but we feel it is disappointing because it lacks the urgency needed to deliver on its missions. We find this particularly frustrating at a time when so many people are desperate for the Government to provide leadership and support. When there is so much work to be done, as the Speech said, to

“drive local growth, empowering local leaders to regenerate their areas”,—[*Official Report*, 10/5/22; col. 2.]

I find it surprising that a main element of the Bill—I stress that—is the promise to give residents more of a say over changing street names and ensuring that everyone can continue to benefit from alfresco dining. I readily acknowledge that this brought benefits to business during the pandemic but it is not a key solution to levelling up disadvantaged communities. Our communities and people need so much more than that, as has come out clearly during this debate.

For example, the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, talked of the inequalities in health outcomes and the potential for the provision of healthcare in the high street, to help with regeneration. My noble friend Lady Lister talked of child poverty and the need for a proper strategy to reduce it, as did the noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin. Very importantly, she said that we need to tackle inequalities between people as well as places.

This theme was picked up by my noble friend Lady Prosser, who asked why there was no mention of levelling up opportunities between women and men, and talked about the importance of making the most of women's talents. The noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, talked about the importance of food, noting that food insecurity rates have doubled, particularly among households on universal credit, and that this had never been so bad in her experience.

As my noble friend Lady Blake said, the substance of the levelling-up Bill amounts to little more than the Government marking their own homework on their 12 missions. It lacks new money and new ideas. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford talked about the missing mission and the importance of addressing climate change in this context, as well as the importance of clean air, clean water and access to the environment. I am also concerned that the proposals will continue to pit communities against each other, competing for pots of money, with success determined by the quality of the bid rather than the levels of disadvantage and real need. Last time this happened, many of our poorest areas received nothing at all.

Turning to planning, we welcome the fact that the Government have ditched their previous approach to planning and are now willing to look at how residents might have a greater say over how areas are developed. My noble friend Lady Young of Old Scone talked about the fact that we also need to have a focus on land use and the increasing pressures on the same areas of land for different things and that we must not lose sight of the importance of biodiversity and environmental assessment when we are looking at planning applications. We will continue to make the case for the planning system to be overhauled so that it is more reflective, rational, transparent and democratic and better resourced, putting communities at the heart of good place-making, which will deliver high-quality, zero-carbon, affordable new homes in the places where they are so desperately needed.

Turning to the renters reform Bill, the Government pledged to ban Section 21 no-fault evictions three years ago. They promised renters reforms in the 2021 Queen's Speech, yet failed to deliver. So I ask the noble Lord the Minister to confirm that, this time, the Government are actually going to get on with it. It is disappointing that not enough is being done regarding private renters. We have seen a huge increase in their numbers—nearly a million more than when the Conservatives came to power in 2010. My noble friend Lord Truscott asked about the leaseholder reform Bill, and it would be interesting to get an update from the Minister on that.

We appreciate that the Government will apply the legally binding decent homes standard in the private rented sector—this is important—and will introduce a new ombudsman for private landlords so that disputes can easily be resolved without the need to go to court. We welcome these moves, but we believe that they do little to help those stuck in the system. I ask the Minister: where is the security for private renters who cannot afford to buy their own home and who do not qualify for social rented housing? Many of these are young people who just want a secure home in which to bring up their families.

It is important to recognise the particular difficulties for young people in rural areas where affordable housing can be scarce; in Cornwall, for example, the average house costs nine times the average salary. The noble Lord, Lord Inglewood—my fellow Cumbrian Member of this House—talked about the challenges that we have in Cumbria in this area.

We welcome the announcement of the social housing regulation Bill in the Queen's Speech but will be looking very closely at the detail once it is published to consider whether it will noticeably drive up standards in social housing, ensure that tenants are really heard and that they finally have a means of redress. We agree with the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford, who said that a social housing regulation Bill is a step in the right direction but drew attention to the need for significant investment in new social housing and the importance of a comprehensive housing strategy.

Looking at the non-domestic rating Bill, we again welcome the Government's attempt to modernise the UK's business rates system by providing more frequent revaluations based on more accurate data, which will aim to increase fairness for businesses on the amount of business rates they pay. The noble Baroness, Lady Neville-Rolfe, mentioned the challenges that the increase in internet use has had for traditional ways of doing business. This needs to be very carefully considered. We encourage the Government to help small businesses that have struggled, particularly during the pandemic, by raising the threshold for small business rate relief.

Turning to transport briefly, my noble friend Lord Berkeley referred to the promised world-class transport network and the Williams review. He also expressed his concerns about how the Government will deliver what is needed and stressed the importance of proper funding. The noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, talked about the importance of business involvement in transport infrastructure and how this can help with levelling up, including through using local leadership. My noble friend Lord Snape talked about rail transport and his particular concerns about the lack of focus on safety, management competence, future fare organisation and staffing. I would be interested to know whether the noble Baroness the Minister would reconsider her decision about going out for a day with my noble friend—I am sure that she would enjoy herself.

A number of noble Lords talked about rural communities. I live in a rural community myself, and I think this is something the Government need to consider more carefully. Transport is particularly important for levelling up, and it is hugely important that there is investment in rural transport, particularly bus services. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans talked about the need for a comprehensive rural strategy that should absolutely be part of the levelling-up agenda. As he said, the rural economy is 18% less productive than the national average. Not many parts of our rural areas have good 4G coverage—we certainly do not have any where I live—and many have poor or non-existent mobile phone coverage, although, having said that, sometimes that can be a bit of an advantage. But, overall, this has a negative impact on rural businesses being able to compete in wider markets, and this is something that needs to be seriously addressed when we are looking at the levelling up of those communities.

[BARONESS HAYMAN OF ULLOCK]

The noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, talked about the opportunities for the countryside outlined in the APPG's excellent report—I thank the group for sending me a copy—on levelling up in rural areas. I hope the Minister will respond positively to the suggestions that it contains. This was also mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, and I thank the APPG for this important piece of work.

In conclusion, although we welcome a number of the proposals, we have concerns about this Government's ability to deliver the kind of levelling up in our society that will make a long-lasting difference to people's lives. The cost of living crisis is only adding to the burden of those who are already struggling—my noble friend Lady Ritchie mentioned this. The Government also need to acknowledge that they cannot do all this by themselves; they must empower local authorities, communities and businesses to come together to work on this agenda.

Finally, I look forward to working with noble Lords and the Minister. We had a very constructive working relationship with him on the then Building Safety Bill, and we can have a further constructive working relationship on this—but this Bill needs to be more ambitious in how it will deliver what it proposes, because, without delivery, we have nothing.

7.53 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Lord Greenhalgh)

(Con): My Lords, I am greatly honoured to close the debate on Her Majesty's gracious Speech on the important issues of levelling up, communities and transport. I start by thanking noble Lords for their contributions today and my noble friend Lady Vere for opening the debate so expertly. It has been a pleasure to listen to what has been a well-informed and wide-ranging discussion.

Regional inequalities exist right across the country—inequalities that we have set about tackling in the past year with the levelling-up White Paper. There are disparities between so-called have and have-not places in the United Kingdom. There are places where opportunity matches up to talent and ambition, and places where it does not.

Levelling up is not simply about redressing the north-south divide, because the reality is that there is a north to south Wales divide, an east to west Yorkshire divide, a Norwich to Ipswich divide, a Glasgow to Inverness divide and, for the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, a Workington to Carlisle divide. When we set about tackling these divides earlier this year, we were setting out on a bold mission to try to realise the full potential of every place and every person across the United Kingdom.

When we published the levelling-up White Paper, we set out a clear blueprint for reversing the country's geographic inequalities. Months on from that publication, families everywhere are feeling a cost of living squeeze on their finances caused by inflation, the war in Ukraine and the rise in energy prices. We needed a Queen's Speech that rose to the scale of the moment—recognising the challenging economic climate we find ourselves in, rewarding the sacrifices of the past two years, addressing the cost of living squeeze and setting us on a clear

trajectory towards sustained economic growth. As many noble Lords have reflected in their speeches—although perhaps not all—that is exactly what we have. The Bills I am addressing today meet the needs of the moment, with measures that will support hard-working families, ease the strain on their finances and improve their day-to-day lives.

I start by congratulating the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Guildford for a truly marvellous speech, which really emphasised the importance of thinking about inequalities at a local level, with his experience of moving from Cambridge to Notting Hill, Aston and eventually Guildford. The importance of addressing inequalities in a place that on the surface can appear extremely affluent was a very powerful message.

To respond directly to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, obviously we are pursuing a stand-alone renters reform Bill, and we will have the opportunity to bring that forward. Not only will that scrap Section 21 no-fault evictions and apply the decent homes standard—as the noble Baroness mentioned—but, importantly for landlords, there will be a better system to deal with antisocial behaviour and wilful non-payment of rent, so it will balance the interests of landlord and tenant.

In response to the noble Lords, Lord Truscott and Lord Berkeley, and the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, I am the Leasehold Minister, and I can say at the Dispatch Box that the Government remain committed to delivering the second phase of our major two-part leasehold reform in this Parliament. It is a long-term reform programme, and it is important that we get it right.

The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, wanted to have the strategy of levelling up unpacked. It is very clear that there are four guiding principles: empowering local leaders and communities to regenerate their areas; boosting local growth by increasing productivity, pay and living standards; spreading opportunities and improving public services; and, finally, restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging.

However, it is important that we also address some of the issues that the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, mentioned, about how we deal with healthcare inequalities and the measures we use to address them. The DHSC will lead on the health mission to ensure that the gap in healthy life expectancy between areas will narrow by 2035 and that healthy life expectancy will rise by five years. Equally, finding ways of bringing community healthcare and ambulatory healthcare into the high street could be brought into my department, under levelling up. It is important to ensure that we have healthier lives and to level up by narrowing the gap of seven years in life expectancy that the noble Lord talked about—I think he said it is 15 years when looking at chronic diseases and healthy life expectancy. That is certainly part of our mission.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Valentine, levelling up will boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in places where they are lagging. This is about unleashing the power of the private sector. I am happy to work with the noble Baroness, with her experience in London First, on some of her ideas around partnerships.

The noble Lord, Lord Inglewood, wanted to know how the Government are going to increase capacity to level up. We are increasing UK-wide R&D investment outside the greater south-east, creating three innovation accelerators: one in Greater Manchester, a second in the West Midlands, and a third in the Glasgow city region.

My noble friend Lady Neville-Rolfe was concerned about the impact on planning proposals in slowing down the system. While the Bill we are bringing forward will modernise the planning system and put local people in charge, it will champion beautiful design in keeping with local preferences. Digitising the system will make sure that it is far easier for underrepresented groups to have their say.

My noble friend Lady Neville-Rolfe also raised the issue of supporting SME housebuilders. As she mentioned, the proportion of them has declined. We have launched a £1.5 billion levelling-up home building fund, which provides loans to SME builders to deliver 42,000 homes, so that is definitely a move in the right direction.

There was a group of contributions—from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and the noble Lords, Lord Cameron of Dillington and Lord Carrington—about what the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will do for rural communities. We are rolling over the local government finance settlement from last year, including the rural services delivery grant of some £85 million. To respond to the points raised by the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, we are making sure that planning officers in rural areas have the requisite skills to develop the right planning policies for their areas.

On permitted development rights, we have introduced a range of PDRs to enable farmers to change agricultural buildings for commercial or residential use. To respond to the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, we have seen 212,000 affordable homes provided in rural authorities in England between April 2010 and March 2021.

The noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, raised the importance of rural broadband connectivity. We have committed a sum of £5 billion to Project Gigabit to bring broadband to 85% of the UK by 2025, so we are continuing to roll it out to those areas.

The noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford raised the important question of the environment. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will give communities the tools to put environment at the heart of their neighbourhoods. It will simplify the environmental impact assessment process, and the green belt will continue to be protected.

The noble Lord, Lord Shipley, with his considerable experience of local government, wanted to know about councils rejected from the levelling-up funds. All unsuccessful applicants were offered feedback, even though it was verbal feedback, and we will look to see whether we can strengthen that. Importantly, they were given support and invited to bid for the second rounds, which were recently opened. The proof of the pudding is how well they do with the benefit of that feedback, but I take his points on board.

I will, of course, meet with the noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, at any time; I make that commitment. The levelling-up agenda is about ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities, no matter their age or location, so of course that extends to children in poverty. That is why we have the missions on well-being and life expectancy; it is for all. I make the same point in response to the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, with whom I will of course visit a food bank. I am happy to take that on board and go with my former City Hall colleague to visit a food bank. We want to see quality of life improve for everyone.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Prosser, I say that levelling up means levelling up for women, for men and for everybody. No one will be left behind. We certainly want to see levelling up for women in left-behind areas and more opportunities for all. Levelling up will support part-time jobs; quality of work is an important element of levelling up, and the living standards mission will drive progress on boosting pay, which is one of the key elements of quality of work.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Lister, as a previous Communities Minister I can say that the Government have launched £10 million of new capital funding for local authorities to build new transit and permanent Travellers' sites, which is important. Also importantly, we have provided £1.4 million in targeted educational support for GRT young people, so there are some tangible measures of support for the GRT community.

Both the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford and the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, wanted to see commitment towards social housing. I point to the affordable homes programme of some £11.5 billion, which is looking to deliver up to 180,000 affordable homes and a record number of social rented homes—some 32,000 are committed over that period, which is more than the previous period.

In response to my noble friend Lady Neville-Rolfe on housing for the elderly and vulnerable, I say that local authorities assess the types of homes needed for different groups in their communities. Obviously, our affordable homes programme helps to deliver those homes, based on local housing need.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie of Downpatrick, on the geographic inequalities of Northern Ireland, I say that, obviously, the people of Northern Ireland deserve a stable and accountable devolved Government. We have taken action to support households and businesses, with over £22 billion in 2022.

I now turn to transport matters. Buses have been mentioned by many noble Lords. My noble friend Lady Vere pointed out that the Bus Services Act 2017 provides all the legislative underpinning needed. We do not need more legislation; we need to focus on delivery. That is why we recently announced £1.1 billion of funding that, using the existing legislative regime, will transform bus networks. We will indeed “bus back better” with that £1.1 billion of funding.

The noble Lord, Lord Shipley, wanted to know the plans for areas that got no money towards improving bus services—he mentioned the Liverpool City Region and South Yorkshire. Both are receiving funding from the city region sustainable transport settlements, and

[LORD GREENHALGH]

Liverpool has also received an indicative allocation to start delivering its bus service improvement plan—so failure does not mean that there is not some form of support by some other means.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, on the plans for Great British Railways to improve rail infrastructure in Wales, I say that the Government are exploring a joint working agreement between Transport for Wales and Great British Railways to improve the rail offer in Wales.

I turn to HS2, on which there were many contributions. The Government have obviously set aside £100 million to look at the most effective way to take HS2 trains to Leeds. The terms of reference for the integrated rail plan will be set out shortly, and the Government are committed to delivering HS2 East.

In response to my noble friend Lady Neville-Rolfe on whether the transport Bill will implement the recommendations made by her committee on ticketing, I say that the Government have committed over £360 million of investment in fares, ticketing and retail, announced in the spending review. This will transform the customer experience. The transport Bill will empower Great British Railways to go further still in improving the customer experience.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, on provisions for consultation about HS2 with local authorities, I say that, on a project of HS2's scale, local impacts will unfortunately be unavoidable. High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd needs to ensure that communities are properly informed. Complaints about HS2 activity continue to fall, from a peak in February 2021, despite construction gathering pace, so there is some improvement. High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd recognises the issues raised by the noble Baroness.

In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Young, on ancient woodland, I say that our first environmental sustainability progress report shows that design work on phase 1 of HS2 has so far made good progress on minimising impacts. Some 5.7 hectares of ancient woodland that had been expected to be needed for construction will no longer be impacted, including seven woodland sites where there will be no impacts at all. There are some lessons there for the next leg of HS2, and I am sure that more improvements will be forthcoming.

In response to the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, who wanted to know why there was no commitment to an underground station in Manchester, I say that I am told that this would delay the delivery of HS2 services and cost up to £5 billion to deliver. This has been properly considered and ruled out on cost and delivery-delay grounds.

I turn now to the vexed questions of the regulation of e-scooters and pedicabs. We obviously recognise that new forms of micromobility are important for the future of transport. I can confirm that the transport Bill will address this, including regulations focused on maintaining safety, and ensuring the licensing of e-scooters and pedicabs.

The noble Lord, Lord Mountevans, raised the issue of the rollout of freeports and how that will impact more widely. The Government will fully evaluate the

impact of the programme to provide an evidence base for the future of levelling-up initiatives.

Turning to the request from the noble Baroness, Lady Benjamin, for a free bus pass for children, I am told that this would require primary legislation and that it is currently not in the scope of the transport Bill. However, local authorities in England already have the power to offer concessions in addition to their statutory obligations.

My noble friend Lord Borwick mentioned the importance of bringing in more accessible taxis for disabled people, and that there had been a commitment to this 27 years ago—I was not around then, certainly not at the Dispatch Box—and that, to use the term he used, the clock is ticking. All I can say is that our updated best practice guidance on taxis and private hire vehicles includes a recommendation that local licensing authorities incentivise the uptake of wheelchair-accessible vehicles where mandating them would be inappropriate. I am sure that he is an inveterate campaigner and will continue to have fruitful dialogue with my noble friend Lady Vere.

The noble Baroness, Lady Lister, mentioned the employment Bill and why it was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. We have a strong labour market, with unemployment back below its pre-pandemic rate, and we are supporting people into high-skilled, well-paid work through our multi-billion-pound plan for jobs.

My noble friend Lady Neville-Rolfe raised the reform of business rates and whether it might not help the high streets, but certainly we are providing around £1 billion of support in the next five years through the business rates system. The Bill does ensure that properties are revalued every three years, so business rates keep pace with the property market.

There was an intervention during the speech of my noble friend Lady Vere from the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock, about whether the boycotts Bill would apply to the Scottish Government. I am delighted to say that the foreign affairs (economic activity of publicly funded bodies) Bill—also referred to as the boycotts, divestment and sanctions Bill—will extend and apply across the United Kingdom, so it does apply to Scotland. I am sure that the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, will be delighted to hear that.

The noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, wanted to know whether the Government would commit to a new good food Bill. The Government have committed to publishing a food strategy White Paper, which will bring forward recommendations from Henry Dimbleby's independent review towards a national food strategy to help ensure that everyone can access, understand and enjoy the benefits of a healthy and sustainable diet.

I believe that Her Majesty's gracious Speech reaffirms this Government's commitment to level up every part of the country. Once in place, this legislation is going to ease the immediate cost of living, while opening up new opportunities across the United Kingdom for jobs and growth. It is going to make every part of our country a great place to live, start a family, own a home and start a business; it is going to ensure that no person or community is left without hope or opportunities. These are ambitions I am sure that everyone in this House shares, and over the course of today's debate

we have all reinforced our shared commitment to end disparities and unleash opportunity. In the months ahead, I look forward to hearing more of your Lordships' valuable insights and working together on the many Bills coming forward in the forthcoming Session.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned at 8.14 pm.

