

**Wednesday
25 October 2023**

**Volume 738
No. 212**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 25 October 2023

House of Commons

Wednesday 25 October 2023

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—
Single-sex Spaces

1. **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to protect single-sex spaces.
[906691]

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): We are committed to maintaining the safeguards that allow organisations to provide single-sex services. The Equality Act 2010 sets out that providers have the right to restrict use of services on the basis of sex where there is justified and proportionate reason.

Vicky Ford: A number of Members of the House have relatives or family members who are trans, and we will all have constituents who are members of the trans community. Does the Minister agree that trans people need safe spaces, too?

Maria Caulfield: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the tone in which the debate should take place. Just a few weeks ago, we had a debate in Westminster Hall where I absolutely made that point. This is not about pitting women against the trans community. Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, but it is important that biological women have the ability to access single-sex spaces, too.

Candidate Diversity: Democratic Process

2. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help increase the participation of minority ethnic groups in the democratic process.
[906692]

15. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): Whether she has had discussions with stakeholders on improving the diversity of parliamentary candidates.
[906705]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): The Government have worked hard to remove any material obstacles to democratic participation for all eligible groups. Registering to vote is quick and easy, taking as little as five minutes. Any elector without an

accepted form of photographic identification can apply for a voter authority certificate from their local authority free of charge, or alternatively they could vote by post or proxy.

Theresa Villiers: I have a thriving British-Albanian community in my Chipping Barnet constituency, making a really positive contribution to our culture and economy. What more can the Government do to encourage them to be involved in campaigning at elections, voting in elections and standing as candidates in elections?

Kemi Badenoch: I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts in ensuring that everyone participates in the democratic process. I agree with her, but it is ultimately for local registration teams to ensure as best they can that all eligible electors in their area are correctly registered to vote. We want to ensure that all parts of the UK are equally represented in politics and the democratic system where they are eligible.

Rosie Duffield: With almost a quarter of the UK's population registered as disabled, does the Minister agree that all political parties need to try harder in the run-up to the next general election in selecting a diverse group of candidates, with perhaps slightly less emphasis on nepotism and more on the representation of ordinary voters, including those from all ethnic minority backgrounds?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Lady asks an excellent question, and I thank her for all the work she does campaigning for women's rights. She has been at the vanguard of some contentious issues. She is quite right to raise candidate selection. All political parties have to make the very best of efforts in ensuring that a meritocracy exists and helping those including disabled people who might need additional assistance in participating through some of the difficult selection processes. I highlight again how diverse the Conservative party is, and the Cabinet in particular. That is testament to the fact that meritocracy works. We hope that others will learn from our example.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): The Labour party has more women and ethnic minority MPs than the rest of the political parties put together. We know that that leads to better outcomes for British people, but there is always further to go. That is why we have committed to enacting section 106 of the Equality Act so that all political parties would be required to be transparent about the diversity of their candidates. Why will the Government not do the same?

Kemi Badenoch: At the end of the day, it is the electorate who decide who gets to represent them. The hon. Member might be cherry-picking statistics on which party is the most diverse. We can do the same and talk about how the Conservatives have had three female Prime Ministers when Labour has not had even a single leader. If she wants to dive deep down and be granular, we have more black men in our party than in all the other parties combined. This splitting hairs is not helpful; what we need to do is ensure that the process is as meritocratic as possible.

Women in STEM Jobs

3. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help support women in STEM roles. [906693]

11. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help support women in STEM roles. [906701]

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): We have made great progress in increasing the number of girls studying STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—subjects. Our challenge now is to do more to get them into STEM jobs. To support that, we launched a scheme called STEM returners, as one of our programmes to grow the skills of people who have taken a career break. We have so far had 42 women in our first cohort and 54 have signed up for our second cohort, getting women with experience and skills back into STEM jobs.

David Duguid: While the UK-wide responsibility in areas such as energy and defence among others is reserved to this Parliament, education, skills, universities, colleges and apprenticeships among others are devolved. What discussions has my hon. Friend the Minister had with other UK Government Ministers and devolved Administrations to ensure that the opportunity for women to get their STEM education and skills, and to maintain their careers, is maximised across the United Kingdom?

Maria Caulfield: I thank my hon. Friend for his work, particularly around promoting the energy sector across the United Kingdom. We are making progress on trying to get women and girls into that vital sector. One of our Build Back Better campaigns is seeking to inspire women from all walks of life to work in the green energy economy and raise awareness of green education, training and careers. My colleague the Minister with responsibility for employment and I regularly meet devolved colleagues to discuss how we can have a United Kingdom approach to this issue.

Maggie Throup: Last week I met a group of life science apprentices, young women and young men, who have taken up some great opportunities with STEM employers. One issue they raised with me was the lack of information about non-trade apprenticeships when they were considering their career options. What more can my hon. Friend do to promote STEM apprenticeships for the 16 to 18-year-olds who may not want to pursue the university route?

Maria Caulfield: My hon. Friend is a shining example of how women can lead in the STEM sector, with her own experience in clinical care before she came to this place. We are trying to drive forward apprenticeships, particularly in STEM subjects. Since May 2010, over 5 million apprenticeship starts have happened and our apprenticeship diversity champions are helping those aged 16 and over to get into apprenticeships, particularly in STEM subjects. Organisations such as UCAS and Young Women's Trust are also doing that specific work.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Scottish Government have a number of ambitions to address the lack of women in STEM occupations

and settings such as schools. Those ambitions start early. The gender pay gap action plan examines how schools have a key role in helping young women make transitions into broader occupations, as well as setting out measures that address occupation segregation, leading to more women accessing STEM careers. What are the Government doing to provide that kind of support?

Maria Caulfield: One key route is through apprenticeships. For many young women, being able to earn while you learn and getting that work experience is vital for them to progress through the STEM sector. We have 22,000 degree apprenticeships and seven masters degree apprenticeships. That is an increase of 14%. In STEM subjects in particular, we have 360 employer design apprenticeships, including level 3 cyber-security, level 4 software development and level 6 civil engineering. We believe apprenticeships are the way forward to drive more women into STEM areas.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that answer. In Northern Ireland, women are under-represented in STEM industries. Only 15% of women in Northern Ireland study core STEM subjects, compared to 36% of men. That is a clear anomaly that needs to be addressed. May I encourage the Minister to use her office to engage with the Department for the Economy to encourage more uptake in university STEM subjects? Women can do the job every bit as well as a man given that opportunity.

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Member for that question. That goes to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid). We need a UK approach. Across the Government, whether in the Department for Work and Pensions or the Department for Education, we focus on trying to improve all avenues for those, particularly women, who want to go into STEM areas.

LGBT People

4. **Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): What steps she is taking to help improve the lives of LGBT people. [906694]

The Minister for Equalities (Stuart Andrew): The UK has a proud history of LGBT rights, and one of the world's most comprehensive and robust legislative protection frameworks for LGBT people. We have taken great strides as a country over the last couple of decades and it is my job to continue that journey.

Elliot Colburn: The Minister is absolutely right: great things have been done for LGBT+ people in the last 13 years, including blood donation changes, the PrEP—pre-exposure prophylaxis—roll-out, and of course same-sex marriage. However, hate crime against LGBT+ people is on the up, conversion therapy still has not been banned and the UK has slipped down the ranking for LGBT+ equality. I know that this Minister takes these issues incredibly seriously, but how can he assure me that the Government take them seriously and that they will tackle them as a matter of urgency?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue of all forms of anti-LGBT hate crimes. They are utterly unacceptable, and we have a robust legislative framework to respond to that. I met representatives of

the Metropolitan police and other stakeholders just last week to ensure that everything possible was being done to crack down on such crimes. There will be further questions later about conversion practices, and we are considering all those issues. This is a complex area of work, but I give my hon. Friend a personal commitment that anything to do with LGBT rights and improving the lives of LGBT people will be high on my agenda.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): A Bill banning the psychological abuse that some people call conversion therapy has been promised repeatedly in this Session from that Dispatch Box. Where is it?

Stuart Andrew: I accept that, and I apologise for the fact that it has taken so long, but, as I have said, it is a complex issue. I have been personally campaigning for this for many years, but even I recognise there are deep complexities. It is right that we take the time to consider each of the issues carefully, so that what we have in place is consistent, robust and up to date, and tackles these appalling practices.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Almost 2,000 days have passed since the Government first promised to ban conversion therapy, and 533 days have passed since a conversion therapy Bill was promised in the last Queen's Speech. The delays are not this Minister's responsibility; according to the press, they are a result of differing views on the Government Front Bench, but because of that there is still no Bill. Can the Minister tell the House whether the next King's Speech will include a commitment to a full, loophole-free ban on LGBT conversion therapy—yes or no?

Stuart Andrew: I should have thought the hon. Lady would know that no one ever makes announcements about what is in the King's Speech ahead of His Majesty's delivery of that speech. Let me also say to her, respectfully, that she should not believe everything she reads in the press. As for the rest of her question, I refer her to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Anneliese Dodds: I would therefore counsel the Minister to advise his colleagues to stop briefing the press on these issues and get on with delivering, because there are failures when it comes to delivery for LGBT+ people. Yesterday I met Michael Smith, who was viciously attacked at a bus stop simply for being with his partner. Police-recorded sexual orientation hate crime has increased by more than 70% in the last five years, and more than a third of all hate crimes are now "violence against the person" offences. I know that the Minister cares deeply about this subject, so can he please explain why his Government do not agree with Labour or with the Law Commission that every violent act of hatred should be punished in the same way—as an aggravated offence?

Stuart Andrew: Let me say to the hon. Lady that as someone who was hospitalised after being attacked because of my sexuality, I know how difficult that is. It is not just the attack that is painful but what is left afterwards.

I will continue to raise each of these issues, but I want to make this point. I keep hearing that we do not care about LGBT issues. It was this Government who introduced

same-sex marriage, and it was this Government who introduced it in Northern Ireland. It was this Government who introduced Turing's law in 2017. We have modernised gender recognition certificates and made them affordable. We have removed self-funding for fertility treatment for same sex-couples, lifted the ban on blood donation, and tackled LGBT-related bullying in schools. We have apologised for the way in which LGBT people were treated in the armed forces, and we have provided funding to ensure that LGBT rights across the Commonwealth are protected.

Mr Speaker: Order. We need to make progress now.

Pay Inequalities

5. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling pay inequalities in the labour market. [906695]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): Owing to my joint roles—I am also Secretary of State for Business and Trade—I have a unique understanding of unjust pay disparities, and I am proud of the steps that this Government have taken to tackle them. We will publish new guidance in April to help employers to measure, report on and address unfair ethnicity pay differences, and it was a Conservative Government who introduced gender pay gap reporting in 2017.

Stuart C. McDonald: Nineteen US states have banned employers from asking prospective employees about their salary history, meaning that people are paid what the job is worth and not just what the bosses can get away with. This has had a massive impact on tackling unequal pay for women and black workers in particular. Having talked about piloting a similar salary history measure, why have the Government appeared to stall on what would be a really positive policy?

Kemi Badenoch: We are not stalling. Our pilot will support employers to take steps towards transparency in their own organisations, to see the impact for themselves. We know that this is not straightforward, which is why we will ensure that employers looking to implement greater transparency in their recruitment processes are able to access best practice and learn from each other.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The UK Government's "Inclusive Britain update report" acknowledges the value of measuring the ethnicity pay gap and the Government have published guidance for employers noting that employers can use ethnicity pay gap calculations to consider evidence-based actions to address any unfair disparities. Despite that, the UK Government will not legislate to mandate reporting. Since employment law is a reserved matter, will the Minister urge her Government to do the right thing and mandate ethnicity pay gap reporting, or urge the devolution of employment law to Scotland so that the Scottish Government can?

Kemi Badenoch: Absolutely not. This is something that we will not be devolving and it absolutely should not be mandatory. Ethnicity pay gaps cannot be measured in the same way as gender pay gaps. I have said this to the hon. Lady at this Dispatch Box multiple times. We can measure a pay gap where a population is binary male and female but we cannot do it across a broad spectrum of ethnicity. We have published guidance for those employers who want to do this, but it would be absolutely wrong to mandate.

Disabled People: Additional Costs

6. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What recent estimate she has made of the level of additional costs affecting households with disabled people. [906696]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): We will spend around £78.6 billion this year on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. No such estimate has been made but as a Government we are providing total support of more than £94 billion from 2022 to 2024 and we are determined to help all households and individuals with the rising cost of bills. This includes an additional £150 for more than 6 million disabled people.

Andrew Gwynne: That is great, but back in the real world the Minister really does know that the rising cost of living is having a disproportionately negative impact on disabled people. They face higher living costs as a consequence and they still face barriers to employment. Does she accept that targeted action, including disability pay gap reporting, is now needed to support disabled people?

Mims Davies: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about his disabled constituents, I can point him to the household support fund, which is also helping those constituents and their carers. In his constituency—in his real world—an additional £4.4 million has landed to support him. This is not a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions, but I am sure that it will have been heard.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that funds are made available to get disabled people into employment via Access to Work. However, there are significant delays in those funds being made available, once granted. Additional costs to disabled people—for example, their paying £6,000 for powered wheels—come at more of a cost when they are obliged to pay for them on their credit card because they cannot access the funds in time. Will she please work with colleagues across the DWP to ensure that there are no delays in getting access to the funds that will help disabled people into work?

Mims Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for her point, which gives me the opportunity to say that from next Tuesday an additional £300 will be paid in cost of living payments to those who are eligible. Regarding access to work, there is a continuing focus on improving waiting times for customers and we are streamlining and digitising the process. Indeed, I spoke to the Minister

for Disabled People this week on exactly this matter in relation to one of my own constituents, and I will see that he hears it again from my right hon. Friend.

Topical Questions

T1. [906706] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): As the Minister for Women and Equalities, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the way religious communities in the UK have been impacted by the terrible events in the middle east. All our citizens have a right to feel secure and at peace in Britain. One of the reasons we have been able to integrate people from all over the world is an unwritten rule that people with roots elsewhere do not play out foreign conflicts on the streets of this country. We owe a duty of care and civility to our neighbours, whatever their ethnicity, religion or background. All of us are free to practise our faiths and celebrate our cultures, but we must do so in a positive way, consistent with fundamental values that are the bedrock of Britain.

I am afraid to say that in recent days we have seen that social contract being breached. In particular, I believe that the hostility directed towards our Jewish communities, the calls for jihad, the ostentatious indifference to the victims of terrorism, the aggressive chanting by mobs brandishing placards of hate, and the odious people ripping down posters of missing children do not reflect our values as a nation.

We must all stand firm on the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, particularly in the public space that we all share. That is why today I am reminding public sector organisations that they have a legal obligation, as part of the equality duty, to consider how they contribute to the advancement of good relations in communities as they deliver public services. Where organisations are having difficulty doing that, I urge them to write to me as soon as possible for advice on how they can fulfil their legal obligations.

Vicky Ford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. There should be no place for hatred in our communities.

As a woman in her 50s—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”]—I know how challenging the menopause can be, especially when you have a busy job. What support is there for working women with the menopause?

Kemi Badenoch: I hope that my right hon. Friend feels that she is supported by all of her colleagues. I am delighted to let her know that there will be a full debate on menopause tomorrow, led by the Minister for Social Mobility. I am proud of the great strides that Helen Tomlinson has made since her appointment as the Department for Work and Pensions menopause employment champion. The report “No Time to Step Back” details this progress and looks forward to the next six months, including the sector-specific workshops.

T2. [906707] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): In less than a decade, the proportion of female pensioners in the UK living in poverty has risen by 6%, which means that one in every five female pensioners are below the breadline, despite the fact that

the number of female pensioners has fallen due to the rise in state pension age, which disadvantaged tens of thousands of older women. Does the Minister for Equalities share my concern that in the UK today 20% of female pensioners are living in poverty, and what action will she take to address that?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank the hon. Lady for her point. In 2021-22, there were 200,000 fewer female pensioners in absolute poverty than in 2009-10, after housing costs. I point the hon. Lady to the Barnett consequential of the household support fund in Scotland, which is there to be distributed by her Government to those in need.

T3. [906708] **Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): As you will know, Mr Speaker, Watford is a thriving multi-faith community, and it is a privilege to take part in so many celebrations and learn about the history of each culture that makes Watford unique and amazing. Will the Minister join me in encouraging colleagues to attend the event that I will be hosting with the Inter Faith Network on 14 November to promote a national organisation to understand how we can all engage better with the different faiths in our communities, and will he please also consider attending the event, if diaries permit?

The Minister for Equalities (Stuart Andrew): Faith is a vital part of people's identities and of their communities. We fully support the invaluable work being done by people around the country who are inspired by their faith. My hon. Friend is a great advocate for the work that goes on in his own constituency. I certainly encourage people to attend that event, and I will do everything I can to pop in myself.

T5. [906710] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): A year ago, the Public Order Bill was passed in this House, and with it my new clause, which was overwhelmingly supported in a free vote by MPs on both sides of the House, to stop women being deterred from using and entering the doors of abortion clinics by protests outside. A year on, intimidation is worse than ever, because the legislation is not being enacted. Will the Minister look into why that is and fix this now?

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): If the hon. Lady has a specific example of where that is happening, I will be happy to look at it if she raises it with me.

T4. [906709] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): In its 2021 census, the Office for National Statistics estimated that there are 260,000 transgender people in the UK. Does the Minister agree with the separate Office for Statistics Regulation that, due to skewed methodology, this number is likely to have been a huge overestimate?

Kemi Badenoch: I share the concerns that the Office for Statistics Regulation has raised and, in February, I asked my officials to explore with the ONS whether because of a lack of understanding of the question the census had the number right. We need to be very careful about language. People do not often understand what we mean when we use terms such as transgender and gender identity. We have to make sure that they understand them. The ONS will be conducting and reporting on

research to explore that issue, and it should publish the results by the end of the year and will monitor them going forward.

T6. [906711] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): Some years ago, the United Nations found that disabled people's rights were being systematically violated by Conservative Ministers. Recently, the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that nothing at all had changed. Is the Minister not ashamed?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that matter. The point regarding the EHRC is that it is an independent and public body, but I do not think that any Member comes to this House to erode anybody's rights whether they are disabled or have a health issue. I absolutely refute what the hon. Lady says. She should look at our actions and our record of the work that we have done around British Sign Language and more widely. We stand by all constituents whatever their needs.

Mr Speaker: Just before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I would like to welcome to this Chamber the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906714] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 25 October.

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): I know that the sympathies of the whole House are with all those affected by Storm Babet and in particular the friends and families of those who lost their lives.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Stuart C. McDonald: I join the Prime Minister in expressing my sympathies to all those affected by the recent storms.

Two million people just cannot be sustained from 20-odd aid lorries. Utter catastrophe is being unleashed in Gaza. Does the Prime Minister not now see that only a humanitarian ceasefire can bring about the scale of emergency aid that is needed? Of course Israel has a right to defend itself in line with international and humanitarian laws, but we must also speak out when those laws are breached. Surely he agrees that depriving 2 million civilians—a million of them children—of food, water, medicines and fuel is not in accordance with international law. Will he press Israel to restore the supply of these essentials for the sake of innocent civilians and the future of the entire region?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we do everything we can to get humanitarian aid to those who need it in Gaza, which is why, on Monday, we announced a doubling of our international aid to the region and why the Development Minister is actively engaged with our partners on the ground to ensure that that aid gets to those people as quickly as possible.

Q3. [906716] Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Double child rapist and murderer Colin Pitchfork had yet another parole review hearing only a few weeks ago. I thank the Justice Secretary for having listened to me and engaging the reconsideration mechanism rule. I know that the Prime Minister does not have any decision-making role on the independent Parole Board. It is independent of Government, but it is a wing of the Executive; it is not the judiciary. Does the Prime Minister agree that, generally, as a point of principle, men—sexual offenders—who rape and brutally murder young women, as Mr Pitchfork did to Dawn Ashworth and Lynda Mann in my constituency, should remain in prison for most of their natural lives?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the public should be confident that murderers and rapists will be kept behind bars for as long as is necessary to keep the public safe. That is why we are reforming the parole system. Our Victims and Prisoners Bill will mean that minimising risk and protecting the public are the sole considerations in Parole Board decisions. It will also give the Justice Secretary the power to step in on behalf of the public and take a second look at decisions to release the most serious offenders, including murderers and rapists. Last week, we announced that we will be introducing longer sentences for dangerous criminals. For the most heinous crimes, life will mean life.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in his comments about all those affected by the storms.

I start by welcoming my hon. Friend the new Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Alistair Strathern)—the first Labour MP ever to represent those beautiful towns and villages. He defied the odds, history and of course the fantasy Lib Dem bar charts. I also welcome my hon. Friend the new Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards). She will be a powerful representative for her constituents. Is the Prime Minister as relieved as I am that those constituents are not burdened with his defeated candidate, who told them—do not worry, Mr Speaker; I am going to sanitise this—to eff off if they are struggling with the cost of living?

The Prime Minister: I am proud of what this Government have been doing to support the most vulnerable over the past year. In fact I join the right hon. and learned Gentleman in welcoming the new Members to their places. After all, I suspect that the new Member for Mid Beds may actually support me a little more than the last one—[*Laughter.*] I did notice that the new Member said that they will be opposing new housing in their local area, while the new Member for Tamworth claimed that they will protect green spaces. I urge them to have a word with their leader, because that is not exactly his position—although with his track record of U-turns, who knows what his housing policy will be next week?

Keir Starmer: So much for being the change candidate! The Prime Minister cannot even distance himself from those appalling comments. I have to ask him, where on earth does he think his candidate got the idea in the first place that throwing expletives at struggling families was his Government's official position?

The Prime Minister: Let us just look at the record of what this Government are doing to help those people: paying for around half of a typical family's energy bill over the last year; support worth over £1,500; the most vulnerable in our society receiving £900 in direct cost of living support; record increases in the national living wage; record increases in welfare; and this winter, pensioners to receive an extra £200 or £300 alongside their winter fuel payment to help them through what we know is a tough time. All of that significant support, funded by this Government, would be put at risk by Labour's reckless plans to borrow £28 billion a year.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister keeps boasting about how great things are; the voters keep telling him that he has got it wrong. I can see why the Tamworth candidate thought that he was just following Government lines. Annalisa and her two children lived in their home for eight years. In May, they were kicked out with a no-fault eviction notice. Despite his Government's pledge to scrap no-fault evictions, this week the Prime Minister crumbled to the landlords on his own Back Benches and killed the policy. What message, other than the message delivered by his candidate in Tamworth, could Annalisa possibly take from that?

The Prime Minister: We have taken significant action to help renters like Annalisa and others. We have capped holding deposits at one week. We have protected tenants from rip-off tenancy fees, delivered almost half a million affordable homes for rent, halved the percentage of substandard homes in the private rented sector, and strengthened local authority enforcement powers, because the Government are delivering for renters. We are also trying to ensure that the new generation can buy their own home, so perhaps the Leader of the Opposition can explain to Annalisa and millions of others why when we brought forward plans to unlock 100,000 new homes, he stood in the way of that? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Just to say, it is Prime Minister's questions, not Opposition's questions. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, Prime Minister; it is Prime Minister's questions. I do not need you nodding against my decision.

Keir Starmer: I am sure that Annalisa and her children, who have now been evicted, will take great comfort from that non-answer.

Emma and her teenage son saw their mortgage go up by more than a quarter—[*Interruption.*] Government Members may think this is funny, but this is real life. After 16 years of dutifully paying the mortgage, for the first time she is having to choose between new shoes for her son and putting the heating on—all because the Prime Minister's party crashed the economy, pushing mortgage rates to their highest levels in decades. He says, "Ignore all that"—ignore the fact that the guilty men and women responsible are standing again as his candidates and still setting his policy. Can he not see why Emma might think that his party is telling them exactly where to go?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman keeps talking about the mini-Budget; I will not ask him a question, Mr Speaker, but I will just point out that he actually supported 95% of the things in that mini-Budget, which I did not. He has had a whole

summer to get on top of the details, but he is still ignoring the fact that rising interest rates are a global challenge. They are at their highest level in America and Europe for more than 20 or 30 years. Mortgage rates have doubled in America and trebled in Europe.

To help mortgage holders, we want to ensure that they can use the mortgage charter we have agreed with the banks. Thanks to the steps we have taken, someone with a £200,000 property with about £100,000 left on their mortgage could save more than £350 a month and lock in a new deal six months before theirs ended, and repossessions will be prohibited for 12 months from the first missed payment. The right hon. and learned Gentleman might have missed that that policy is twice as generous as Labour's.

Keir Starmer: Absolutely tone deaf. In every caff, pub and supermarket in Britain, people are having the same conversation: "We can't afford that—put it back on the shelf. It's too expensive." The Prime Minister is completely oblivious, just patting himself on the back.

Emily and Jamie have worked hard and been saving to buy their own home. They were nearly there last year, but he scrapped house building targets because his Back Benchers pushed him around. House building has fallen off a cliff, shattering the simple dream of home ownership for people like Emily and Jamie. Can the Prime Minister now see that, actually, his candidate in Tamworth was just loyally following the party line?

The Prime Minister: These prepared lines really are not working for him any more. The right hon. and learned Gentleman literally asked me a question about the support we are providing for mortgage holders; I gave him the answer to that question and then he read from his script that I had not answered the question. We are providing significant help for all these people.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has moved on to housing targets. Here is the record: 2.5 million additional homes; housing starts double what we inherited from the Labour party; housing supply up 10%; on track to deliver a million new homes; and a record number of first-time buyers. He brought up his candidates in Tamworth and Mid Beds as we opened this session, and he is now saying he wants to build homes; well, both of those candidates say that they want to block new homes in their constituencies.

Mr Speaker: Simon Hoare.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Sorry—Keir Starmer.

Keir Starmer: Across our country the British people are rolling up their sleeves and getting on with it, doing their best in the face of a punishing cost of living crisis and a Government who have abandoned them—abandoned renters at risk of being kicked out, abandoned mortgage payers struggling to make ends meet, and abandoned people who dream of owning their own house. The truth is that the Prime Minister's candidate in Tamworth summed up perfectly just how he and his Tories are treating the British public, so will he just call a general election and give the British public the chance to respond, as they did in Selby, Mid Beds and Tamworth? They have heard the Government telling them to eff off, and they want the chance to return the compliment.

The Prime Minister: As we saw with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's recent decisions on building new houses, politicians like him always take the easy way out, whereas we are getting on with making the right long-term decisions to change this country for the better—on net zero, on High Speed 2, on a smoke-free generation, on education and on energy security. Contrast that with his leadership: too cautious to say anything and hoping that nobody notices. Let me tell him: come that general election, the British people will.

Mr Speaker: I call Simon Hoare.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr Speaker: I said "Hoare," not "More".

Q5. [906718] **Simon Hoare:** That is the first time I have been confused with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: There have been many rumours about you.

Simon Hoare: And of all them are true, Mr Speaker.

Like me, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has the honour and privilege of representing a rural constituency. I am sure that he, like I, occasionally feels a certain degree of frustration that although progress has been made in this area, the rubric of funding formulae for things such as the Environment Agency, local government, the police and education still fails to adequately reflect the difficulties and challenges of delivering public services in rural areas. Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the wider Government use the opportunities of the autumn statement and the forthcoming Budget to explore those issues further and make the delivery of services better for the Prime Minister's constituents and mine?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue on behalf of his and my constituents. It is vital that we have the same high-quality services in rural areas as in our towns and cities. I am pleased to tell him that we are providing £95 million through the rural services delivery grant to help rural councils achieve exactly that. We are currently reviewing the police funding formula. I remember working with him to ensure that the national funding formula for schools takes account of the different characteristics of schools and their pupils. We will continue to keep all those things under review. I agree with him entirely: our rural communities must be given the same funding and public services as everyone else in our country.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP deputy leader.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Yesterday, the UN warned that hospitals in Gaza had just 48 hours of fuel left to keep their electricity going. That was 28 hours ago; the electricity runs out tonight. We have a human responsibility to all the people in Gaza, but we have a particular responsibility for UK citizens, some of whom are in those hospitals, with no food, no water, no medicine and no way out. How much worse does the situation have to get before the Prime Minister will join us in calling for a humanitarian ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: From the start, we have said that the first and most important principle is that Israel has the right to defend itself under international law—our

support for that position is absolute and unchanged—but we have also said from the start that we want British nationals to be able to leave Gaza, hostages to be released, and humanitarian aid to get in. We recognise that, for all that to happen, there has to be a safer environment, which of course necessitates specific pauses, as distinct from a ceasefire. We discussed that with partners yesterday evening at the United Nations, and we have been consistently clear that everything must be done to protect civilians in line with international law and to continue getting more aid flowing into Gaza.

Mhairi Black: The growing calls for a ceasefire are also about calming the situation in the broader region, especially the west bank. UNICEF has reported over 2,000 fatalities and over 5,000 injured children since the conflict began, due to unrelenting attacks. If we ignore that, we risk pouring petrol on a fire in a place that only requires a spark to ignite. Can the Prime Minister understand that joining calls for a ceasefire is now the best—and maybe the only—way to stop this conflict escalating beyond all control?

The Prime Minister: We have to remember that Israel has suffered a shockingly brutal terrorist attack. Hamas are responsible for this conflict, and Israel has the right to protect itself in line with international law, as the UN charter makes clear. We will continue to urge the Israelis to follow international law, but we also have to remember that Hamas cruelly embed themselves in civilian populations.

We are doing everything we can to get aid into the region. I am pleased to say that an RAF flight left the UK for Egypt this morning carrying 21 tonnes of aid for Gaza. The relief supplies include more than 75,000 medical kits, solar lights and water filters for families, and warehousing equipment. Our team are on the ground, ready to receive. We will continue to do everything we can to increase the flow of aid, including fuel, into Gaza.

Q6. [906719] Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): In the matter of Walleys Quarry, my constituents have been utterly let down and failed by the Environment Agency. Not only has it failed to prosecute a rogue operator for the repeated breaches of its permit; we now learn that for the past seven years, all of its monitoring equipment—including in your constituency, Mr Speaker—has been grossly under-recording levels of hydrogen sulphide by a factor of approximately two or three. That is the monitoring equipment that people have been relying on to tell them that their air is clean and safe to breathe. Given everything that has happened, we really need to see some proper action now. I have had enough of the EA, and my constituents have too, so will the Prime Minister do everything in his power to get a grip on this failing organisation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the concerns of his constituents. The Environment Agency's criminal investigation is ongoing so, as I hope he understands, I cannot comment further on it. However, with regard to his concerns about the measurement inaccuracies, I have been assured—and have checked—that the Environment Agency is working swiftly to understand the scale of the problem. The

Environment Secretary is monitoring the situation, and I have asked her to keep my hon. Friend updated regularly.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): A few short months ago, the world came to Belfast to celebrate the Good Friday agreement. At the heart of that agreement was the realisation that we could not use violence as a tool for revenge or to achieve our political aims. As 1,400 Israelis and almost 6,000 Palestinians lay dying or dead, when will the Prime Minister say enough is enough? When will he call for a ceasefire? When will he tell Israel to stop meting out collective punishment to the people of Gaza, and when will he and other world leaders insist on a political solution that involves a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people?

The Prime Minister: As I said, an important principle is that Israel does have the right to defend itself under international law, to ensure that attacks like this one—which was brutal and horrific for its citizens—cannot happen again. We continue to support that position, but, as I said, from the start we have also wanted to ensure that humanitarian aid can go in and hostages and foreign nationals can come out. We recognise that that means there has to be a safer environment, which of course necessitates specific pauses, as distinct from a ceasefire. We discussed exactly this with our international partners yesterday at the United Nations and will continue to do so. As I made clear on Monday, we have doubled down on our efforts to find a better future for the Palestinian people. That has been a feature of all our diplomacy in the region, and we will continue to give all our efforts to making that happen.

Q7. [906720] Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): For too long, Bradford Council has failed to represent the best interests of my constituents, whether in its catastrophic failures on children's services, its inability to invest our own council tax back into Keighley and Ilkley, or its refusal to instigate a review into child sexual exploitation across the Bradford district. Local residents and I are fed up of being ignored by Bradford Council, and we want out. Will the Prime Minister meet me to discuss my case for leaving Bradford Council and creating our own unitary authority that better represents Keighley and Ilkley, putting our priorities first?

The Prime Minister: I know my hon. Friend is a passionate campaigner on this issue, having even introduced a private Member's Bill on it earlier this year. I agree that his council should be working to ensure that it delivers good services for all its residents, including his constituents, and I will certainly arrange for the relevant Minister to discuss his concerns further with him. As my hon. Friend did not do so, maybe I can plug his event this afternoon in the Jubilee Room—a Keighley and Ilkley showcase. Perhaps the Minister can come to that event and discuss it in person then.

Q2. [906715] Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Just a year ago, the new Prime Minister promised to unite our country, not with words but with actions. Quite rightly, voters make a judgment on actions, but in my constituency—as in many others—the Prime Minister has not delivered on his promises. Arbroath House in Easington Colliery is a GP practice without the funding

to deliver basic community health services. Communities such as Shotton, South Hetton, Haswell and Horden lack the police officers to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour. We see sewage being dumped on our coastline at Seaham and Blackhall without prosecution of the privatised water companies, and we see investment for levelling up blocked for Horden. When will the Prime Minister call a general election and let Labour rise to the task of rebuilding Britain?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raised crime. I am pleased to say that crime is now down by over 50% since Labour was last in office, and that includes significant reductions in antisocial behaviour, which he mentioned. Indeed, earlier this year not only did we meet our pledge to deliver 20,000 more police officers—a record number on our streets—but our antisocial behaviour plan is already making a difference, delivering immediate justice and clamping down on that type of activity.

Q9. [906722] Kate Kniveton (Burton) (Con): I support the Government's plans to build more homes and ease housing shortages. However, I have significant concerns about the impacts of developments on our ageing drainage systems and the potential flooding risk this poses, as we are seeing in places such as the Hazelwalls development in Uttoxeter. What steps will the Government take to ensure that, as more houses are built, existing infrastructure is upgraded and maintained by local authorities to ensure that it is not overwhelmed with additional use and less permeable surfaces?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, our traditional drainage systems are under increasing pressure, and that compares with the benefits of sustainable drainage systems, which work in a different way. It was already a requirement that sustainable drainage systems should be given priority in any major new development and developments in flood risk areas, but earlier this year we committed to requiring sustainable drainage systems in all new developments, on top of DEFRA's plan for water, which puts a statutory duty on water companies to produce plans to set out how they will improve, maintain and extend our robust and resilient waste water systems.

Q4. [906717] Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): This morning, I hosted the MS Society and people living with multiple sclerosis to hear about their experiences accessing personal independence payment. Ten years on from its introduction, people with MS and other fluctuating conditions are still too often being denied the support they deserve to manage the extra costs of their condition and to retain their independence for longer. Some 22,524 people with MS have signed a petition calling for a full review of PIP for fluctuating conditions, which is on its way to Downing Street right now. Will the Prime Minister listen to their call?

The Prime Minister: I am very sorry to hear about the experiences of those suffering with MS that the hon. Lady mentions, and I will ensure that the Work and Pensions Secretary looks at their concerns and writes to her.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Q10. [906723] Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): We know that some duck serious questions today, aiming for electoral advantage in the future. May I note that the Prime Minister prefers to take decisions that will benefit the country now and in the longer term, so that we can have more jobs, better education and a shared prosperity?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words.

Q8. [906721] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): While the final report of the infected blood inquiry has been postponed until March, Sir Brian Langstaff, the independent chair, has already published his recommendations on compensation for victims of that scandal. Will the Prime Minister explain why his Government insist on postponing their response until after publication of the final report, kicking it into the long grass and delaying justice, once again, for my constituents Justine, Rachel and Paul, whose fathers died as a result of that scandal, as well as thousands of others across these isles?

The Prime Minister: As I have said previously from the Dispatch Box, what happened was an appalling tragedy, and my heart goes out to all of those affected and their families. I have given extensive evidence to the inquiry, so my position on this matter is on the record. What I would say is that extensive work has been going on in Government for a long time, co-ordinated by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, as well as interim payments of £100,000 being made to those who were affected.

Q12. [906725] Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): The Prime Minister has been a great champion of transport projects on the Welsh borders, including the electrification of the main line in north Wales, the reopening of Corwen station and the Gobowen to Oswestry line, and also substantial levelling-up fund investment in the Llangollen and Montgomery canals. Will the Prime Minister now deliver on the long-awaited Pant-Llanymynech bypass and prioritise the dualling of the A5/A483 in Clwyd South and North Shropshire?

The Prime Minister: We are making significant improvements to our cross-border rail services across the Union. Thanks to our decision on HS2, we can now provide an unprecedented £1 billion of investment to fund the electrification of the north Wales main line, which will ensure reliable, punctual journeys between north Wales and multiple cities across the north-west of England. We are also continuing to develop the Pant-Llanymynech bypass scheme in our next round of the road investment plans, and a section of the A5 in England will be considered by National Highways as part of the midlands and Gloucestershire to Wales route strategy.

Q11. [906724] Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is important that the covid inquiry has all the relevant documents; that is what the public, including thousands of bereaved families, expect and deserve. But despite being a self-described tech bro, the Prime Minister has been unable to locate and provide his WhatsApp messages to the inquiry. Does he agree that devices should be handed over to experts to retrieve this information?

The Prime Minister: Both the Government and I have fully co-operated to provide tens of thousands of documents to the covid inquiry, and I look forward to giving evidence later this year.

Q13. [906726] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): With the ongoing national crisis in NHS dentistry being raised here most weeks, can my right hon. Friend advise as to when the dentistry plan produced by the Department of Health and Social Care will be published? Can he ensure that any clawed-back unspent funds are ringfenced for NHS dentistry, so as to deal with emergencies and to help clear the backlog?

The Prime Minister: We are investing £3 billion in NHS dentistry, and the reformed dental contract is helping to improve NHS access for patients. I am pleased to say that NHS dental activity in the past year increased by almost a quarter compared with the year before, but the forthcoming dental recovery plan, which will be out shortly, will include action to incentivise dentists to deliver even more NHS care.

Q14. [906727] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is an honour to be elected to this place, and the standards by which we are expected to abide matter. Does the Prime Minister therefore accept that it was ill-judged for him to fail to declare to Parliament that companies linked to his wife had benefited to the tune of £2 billion from a fund he had set up as Chancellor? Will he correct the record now?

The Prime Minister: It is worth bearing in mind that Labour Front Benchers backed the Future Fund when it was introduced—indeed, they were calling for more funding for it, not less.

The House will be aware of my wife's shareholdings in various British start-ups. That is her career. Those are on the record, and I am happy to put that on the record again. It is worth bearing in mind that the Future Fund helped more than 1,200 different companies. Neither the Government nor the British Business Bank chose any of those specific investments; it was open to any British firm that met the criteria.

Q15. [906728] **Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): The UK is at risk of being left behind on hydrogen internal combustion engines. The EU and the USA now recognise hydrogen combustion engines as zero-emission and are supporting those industries, as all viable zero-carbon technologies will be needed—particularly for our HGVs, according to the Renewable Hydrogen Alliance. I am working with BorgWarner, PHINIA and many MPs on HICE, because this issue is crucial for UK jobs, skills and manufacturing. Will my right hon. Friend commit to urgently extending the scope of the automotive transformation fund industrialisation grants to include hydrogen engines, so that we win the HICE race?

The Prime Minister: The Government are determined to ensure that the UK remains one of the best locations in the world for automotive manufacturing. Hydrogen fuel cells and their upstream supply chains are already

in the scope of the ATF, and support for the fund has enabled Johnson Matthey's £60 million investment in Hertfordshire to develop hydrogen technologies. I am told by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade that the Department for Business and Trade is continuing to look at the future possibilities for renewable hydrogen and will consider the fund's eligibility in light of the new developments in this space.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): There is an email in my inbox from a constituent who has family in Gaza. It reads:

"My heart can't handle this anymore. We are being massacred, relentlessly bombed. Homes destroyed. No water, no food, no electricity."

Save the Children reports that one child is killed every 15 minutes. As I speak, the lives of 130 babies in incubators are in danger if fuel does not reach their hospital in time. This is collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza, for crimes they did not commit. How many more innocent Palestinians must die before the Prime Minister calls for a humanitarian ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the unity across the House on Israel's right to defend itself in the face of an unspeakable act of terror, but it is also clear that we must support the Palestinian people; they are victims of Hamas, too. Hamas use innocent people as human shields, and we mourn the loss of every innocent life of every people, every faith and every nationality. We are working as hard as we can to get as much humanitarian aid into Gaza as quickly as practically possible.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Last week, Suffolk experienced its worst local floods for over 100 years, with communities in and around Needham Market, Framlingham, Debenham and Wickham Market particularly badly affected. Homes and businesses have been destroyed. In Suffolk, the community has rallied together, in a very stoic and pragmatic way, to support those in need at this very difficult time. What longer-term support can the Prime Minister offer to the people of Suffolk whose businesses and homes have been affected by these floods, to help them to recover and rebuild?

The Prime Minister: Flooding is a devastating experience, and I extend my sympathies to all those affected, including those in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am pleased to say that, through the flood recovery framework, we are confirming additional financial support for the most affected households and businesses. This will include a £500 grant for households and council tax discounts and business rates relief of up to 100% for three months. Small and medium-sized businesses will also be eligible for a £2,500 business recovery grant, and there is a grant of up to £5,000 to make flooded homes more resilient to future flooding. We recognise the heroic efforts of local councils like my hon. Friend's and of emergency responders everywhere who have been working tirelessly in affected areas. They have our thanks, and we stand ready to consider any requests from councils to support their recovery efforts.

Points of Order

12.37 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House rises tomorrow for 10 days, I believe. Regrettably and sadly, it may be likely that a ground invasion of Gaza will commence during that period. This not only has consequences for the Palestinians and the Israelis, but could create turmoil and destabilise the whole middle east. I appreciate that it is the Government who determine whether or not Parliament is recalled but, in your conversations with the Government, will you advise them that the House should be recalled to debate such a serious issue?

Mr Speaker: You are absolutely right that it would not be for me under the normal rules, although I recognise the importance of a major escalation and what could happen in the middle east. You are correct that it would be for the Government—not for me, unfortunately—to recall the House. I will work through the usual channels to try to ensure that, quite rightly, we look to see what can be done in what would be special circumstances, because obviously the House will have prorogued. I do not lose sight of what you have said, and I take it on board. I will work with others behind the scenes to see how we would manage such a situation.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I can assure the House that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my office, and other Departments across Whitehall are very aware that this House will want to be kept updated about the ongoing situation. Many right hon. and hon. Members will have constituents directly affected, and we are working with the House of Commons Library to ensure that people are updated about the situation during the recess.

Mr Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance to understand how we can table written questions about the Government's policy of evicting Afghans from hotel accommodation—a project run by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs out of the Cabinet Office. I have given the Minister notice that I would raise this issue.

Despite the Minister's having given multiple statements to the House this year on the housing of our Afghan friends, my Front-Bench colleagues and I are unable to table written questions to the Cabinet Office, which instead are being reallocated to either the Home Office or the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Table Office staff are great, but I think a bit of parliamentary plumbing needs to be put in place to make sure that effective scrutiny via written question of the Minister leading this area is possible. Please could you advise how I can ensure that the Minister for Veterans' Affairs can be successfully scrutinised by written parliamentary question for the area he leads on in Government?

Mr Speaker: I am concerned by what the hon. Member has raised and grateful to him for giving me notice of his point of order. He will know that the Table Office is guided by Government Departments about the matter of which Ministers respond to questions and on policy areas. I will look into the matter; I take it very seriously and I am very concerned. We all know that the Minister for Veterans' Affairs is very concerned about veterans, so I am sure he will be disappointed to know that those questions are not reaching him. I will investigate.

The Leader of the House is here, and I am sure that she will assist me. I am sure that we can work together, because no Member should be unable to lay questions to the Minister. Ministers are answerable to this House. All Members, from whatever party, should have that ability. I am very disappointed by what I have been told. We will get to the bottom of it.

Register of Derelict Buildings

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23) 12.41 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require local authorities to publish a register of derelict buildings in their area; to make provision in respect of the preparation and maintenance of such registers; and for connected purposes.

My home town, now my home city, is a place I am very proud of. Doncaster has many wonderful assets and the people are the best in the land. However, although 95-plus per cent. of it is great, some parts are not so. The Bill will make a real difference to that.

Derelict buildings are a problem. They blight our cities, towns and villages. This place has provided local authorities with powers to tackle derelict buildings. Sadly though, those powers are not being used as we intended. The Bill will provide an incentive to local authorities to do their duty and exercise their powers for the community as Parliament intended. It will start to address their dereliction of duty. We do not even know exactly how many derelict sites there are or precisely where they are. How can we as a society tackle the problem of derelict buildings until we truly know the scale of the problem? It is a problem of real significance.

As I come home on the train to Doncaster from Parliament on a Thursday evening, the first listed building I see is Denison House by the railway station. The windows are smashed, weeds are growing out of the guttering and there is general neglect—derelict. I walk through the station and see the Grand theatre, another listed building—derelict, again. I walk through town past Waterdale—derelict. I pass by the new expensive and shiny but half-empty council building, and on South Parade I see another Denison House—also listed, and also derelict. This is the former home of Sir Edmund Beckett-Denison, the man who in 1848 brought the railways to Doncaster. That building of his is now an eyesore—derelict, again.

As I drive to the towns and villages across my constituency, I pass Tyram Hall—derelict. I keep on driving into Thorne to view the works to reopen the leisure centre, and I drive by Haynes House—derelict. I pass Thorne brewery—derelict. I have a Secretary of State visit Doncaster, and I take him to Edlington's leisure centre—derelict. Prince's Crescent—many properties there are also derelict. The list goes on and on.

Why is this so? It is because there is no register, no personal responsibility and no example set by Labour-controlled City of Doncaster Council; the powers they hold are not being exercised. Labour's care for our city is seemingly as derelict as the properties I have described. We cannot let this state of affairs continue; if we do, all we shall see is further deterioration and more derelict buildings. It drags us all down to their level—levelling down, not levelling up.

My Bill would ensure that all derelict buildings are identified. It would answer three questions: first, what is the definition of a derelict building; secondly, who will create and maintain the list; and thirdly, how will it be accessible to the public?

Albert Einstein is reputed to have said this about solving problems:

"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions."

I have given this considerable thought, and it seems to me that the first step must be to have a register of derelict buildings. The obvious body well placed for this exercise would be the local authority. Local authorities already have the necessary infrastructure and resources. They have a list of all the empty buildings already. They maintain records for council tax and business rates for properties, including those that are exempt. They will accordingly have a list of all buildings and structures within their area of jurisdiction, within their boundaries. It is important to note that their departments for planning and building control, as well as for council tax and business rates, will have records that can be cross-referenced. Not only are local authorities an obvious candidate, but they are the ones best placed.

There is no need to set up a quango, no need to spend enormous sums of taxpayers' money and, as we have seen, local authorities already have the infrastructure and the records. It would merely be a question of identifying which of the empty buildings are derelict. They all have websites with information accessible by the public. The small steps required of them by the Bill would not incur substantial additional expenditure. Ongoing maintenance of the records would not require much time, effort or expense either.

My Bill will be the first step on this journey to addressing the blight of derelict buildings in our communities. This is the first step to the solution. By passing a law requiring all local authorities to identify derelict buildings in their area, we can start to make progress.

Let me start with the definitions. A derelict site is defined in my Bill as a site that has a structure or structures upon the land that are ruinous, derelict or in dangerous condition. The next step is to identify the derelict buildings and properties. Council officers would first check their existing records for empty properties. Most such properties, if not all, will be easily identified by their status regarding payment of council tax or business rates. A provisional list can be easily created which then should be published.

Additionally, all local authorities have district councillors, who should know their wards intimately—Conservative councillors do; that I do know. It seems to me that each councillor could easily provide the council with the details and addresses of buildings they believe are an eyesore in their locality, and they should be put on a provisional list. I would not expect there to be many that were not in that list. Those properties would then be visited by council officers to establish the condition.

The properties on the provisional list would then be classified as derelict and the owner given 28 days' notice of the intention to give that classification to the property. Any owner would have the right to object, providing reasons in writing. These objections could then be reviewed. The local authority could then either withdraw the classification or confirm it.

So why is such a list of any value to us? The advantages are numerous. It would enable us first to know the scale of the problem. It would provide an incentive to all

areas to see that list reduce, rather than increase. Should the buildings be left as they are, be improved or be demolished? These are questions that will arise, and the right answers may be different across the board. Should improvement works be exempt from VAT? Should compulsory purchase orders be made? Should owners be required to carry out improvements or demolition? Should they be persuaded to address that by carrot or stick, or indeed by both?

Many such questions arise. The Bill does not attempt to answer them. It would, however, enable us for the first time to understand the scale of the problem faced by every part of this wonderful country. I want to ensure that our cities, towns and villages are not blighted. Derelict buildings are a blight—there is no doubt about that. Let us identify the scale of the problem. Let us learn from the wisdom of Albert Einstein. Let us think about the problem. The Bill would enable us to do exactly that. Then, and only then, shall we find the solutions and return all our towns and cities to their former glory.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Nick Fletcher, Dr Liam Fox, Antony Higginbotham, Mark Eastwood, Damien Moore, Paul Bristow, Brendan Clarke-Smith, Mark Jenkinson, Danny Kruger, Lia Nici, Alexander Stafford and Miriam Cates present the Bill.

Nick Fletcher accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November, and to be printed (Bill 378).

Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill

Consideration of Lords message

After Clause 180

FAILURE TO PREVENT FRAUD

12.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): I beg to move,

That this House insists on its amendment 151A and disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 151E and 151F.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment (a), and the following motion:

That this House insists on its Amendment 161A in lieu and disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment 161D in lieu.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am pleased to bring this important Bill back to the House this afternoon, for what I sincerely hope is the last time, given that this will be the third time we have debated and voted on similar issues. I urge Opposition Front-Bench Members and those in the other place not to risk the safe passage of this hugely significant, near-400 page Bill by continuing to press these amendments.

The Government have appreciated the input of right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House—including the right hon. Members for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill)—to help change the Bill for the better. We are discussing failure to prevent, together with the identification of doctoring. The Government are taking world-leading measures—I think this is the first time that a major economy such as ours has implemented them—which we should be proud we are implementing through the Bill. Of course, if the elected Chamber expresses its strong will on these remaining issues for the third time, I very much hope that the other place will agree that now is the time for it to accept that position. I think we would all rather have what we have done than see all this good work being in vain by letting the legislation fall.

Let me discuss the two issues in turn. I will keep my remarks brief as the arguments remain the same as on the preceding two times we have discussed them. I will first address Lords amendments 151E and 151F on the “failure to prevent” threshold. I will also address amendment (a), tabled last night by the right hon. Member for Barking, on a Government review of the threshold. While my noble Friend Lord Garnier’s amendment has moved closer yet again to the Government’s position by exempting micro-entities and small organisations from the offence, I am afraid that the Government will not support the lowering of the threshold at this time. Let me repeat the reasons why. It is already an offence to perpetrate fraud. The objective of the new offence is to ensure that there is accountability where fraud occurs in large organisations. There is simply no need to apply any such offence to smaller organisations.

Every time such an offence is introduced, business owners end up distracted from running their businesses by taking time to reassess their compliance risks, which

[Kevin Hollinrake]

often involves taking professional advice. We assess that the revised threshold proposed by Lord Garnier would cost medium-sized enterprises £300 million in one-off costs and nearly £40 million in annual recurring costs. We should be making it easier for businesses to operate in the UK and only imposing additional regulatory burdens when absolutely necessary. The Government completely reject the notion of using such an offence simply to raise awareness among business owners of the seriousness of the problem of fraud. There would be other, more proportionate ways to do that if necessary.

In response to the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Barking, the Government have already future-proofed the Bill by including a delegated power to allow the Government to raise, lower or remove the threshold altogether. Of course, as with all legislation, the Government will keep the threshold under review. I make a personal commitment to do that and to make changes if evidence suggests that they are required. I do not think that a Government review is necessary for that to take place, so I ask the right hon. Member not to move her amendment. We must bear in mind that a review does not guarantee change anyway. What guarantees change is having the right people at the Dispatch Box making changes, whether those are people from her party or my party, and both parties are equally exercised by these concerns. I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to support the Government motion to disagree with the Lords amendments to ensure that we take a proportionate approach and do not impose unnecessary measures on legitimate businesses that would curb our economic growth.

I turn to Lords amendment 161D, tabled by Lord Faulks, on cost protection in civil recovery cases. The Government remain of the view that such an amendment would be a significant departure from a fundamental principle of justice—that the loser pays—and therefore not something that should be rushed into without careful consideration. Furthermore, as I set out when we last debated this issue, we have seen no clear evidence that the amendment would increase the number of cases taken on by law enforcement. However, that is not to say that such an amendment is necessarily a bad idea. That is why we previously added to the Bill a statutory commitment to review the payment of costs in civil recovery cases in England and Wales by enforcement authorities, to publish a report on the findings and to lay that before Parliament within 12 months.

With regard to civil costs reform in England and Wales, the Government would normally look to consult appropriate consultees, including the senior judiciary, the Law Society and the Bar Council. Enacting the reform now without a full review would not allow judges and relevant organisations, or indeed their counterparts in Northern Ireland and Scotland, to comment on how it would be read and applied in practice. We therefore feel it would be irresponsible for us to rush into making such a significant change at the end of a Bill's passage without full consideration by Government and further scrutiny by Parliament. I very much hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will agree that that is the responsible approach to take and therefore support the Government's position.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister said clearly that there has been consultation with Scotland and Northern Ireland. Will he indicate who those discussions have taken place with? Was it banks, or the Departments looking after matters in the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly? I am keen to know who does the work to ensure that there is accountability for everyone.

Kevin Hollinrake: That is a good point. There are clearly different legal jurisdictions in Northern Ireland and Scotland, with of course the Court of Session in Scotland. From a legal perspective, the counsel in those jurisdictions are the people who discuss this. In wider issues such as failure to prevent, banks and many other stakeholders have people who will consult during the process. I am happy to keep up the conversation with the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Shannon: The reason I asked the question is quite specific, although it might not necessarily relate to the issue directly. The Minister refers to banks. A number of local organisations and community groups back home, which are registered and constituted as community institutions, have had their bank accounts closed. Banks have closed their accounts down because they say they are non-profitable. Is it right that banks should be able to do that? I know the Minister understands the matter—

1 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just help a little bit? The hon. Gentleman is very good, but his intervention is very long. Why does he not put down to speak? It might be easier. I have to get other people in as well.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important issue relating to the concerns about de-banking that we have across the economy. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) is looking at it, as is the Treasury. In future, it is our intention to ensure that when banks close accounts they give a valid reason why, rather than closing them summarily. He is absolutely right to raise the point and I am very happy to engage with him on it, because it affects businesses as well as community groups.

To conclude, I encourage everyone to agree with the Government's position on these two areas. It is vital that we achieve Royal Assent without delay, so we can proceed to implement the important reforms in the Bill as quickly as possible.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It is an honour to speak on the Bill again. I was hoping that we could conclude the proceedings on the Bill as soon as possible and it is disappointing that the Government are yet to make further compromises. The Bill is welcome in principle, but it should not have taken the war on Ukraine to prompt the Government into action. I am grateful to my right hon. Friends the Members for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), and to Members across the House for working together to improve the Bill.

Economic crime poses a threat to our country's national security, our institutions, our economy, and causes serious harm to our citizens and wider society. Conservative

estimates place the cost of economic crime at £290 million a year, according to the National Crime Agency, and the failure to stop criminals benefiting from the proceeds of their crime can fund further criminality. That can include offences such as funding organised crime groups, terrorist activity, drug dealing and people trafficking—this is a very serious issue.

Economic crime, as the Minister knows, has many victims. For too long, the Government have turned a blind eye to corrupt and dirty money, allowing Russian illicit finance to flood into Britain. That lets Putin's cronies stash ill-gotten gains and even recycle the proceeds of crime into luxury properties. That is well documented and has been highlighted by many Members across the House, as well as in Select Committees. According to analysis by Transparency International, properties to the tune of £6.7 billion have been bought through suspicious wealth. Of those, almost a quarter in value were

“bought by Russians accused of corruption or links to the Kremlin.” Most are held via secretive offshore companies. That drives up property prices for ordinary people in our country. More than two-thirds of English and Welsh properties held by foreign shell companies do not report their true owners. Research by the London School of Economics and Warwick University shows that the Register of Overseas Entities is not fully effective. For 71% of such properties, essential information about their beneficial owners remains missing or publicly inaccessible, despite the register. That means we still cannot know whether sanctioned individuals, money launderers or other corrupt individuals are benefiting from those properties.

We must not sustain economic growth off the back of dirty money. The Government have already delayed the Bill and these actions for too long. In that time, money has been lost, economic crime has become ingrained and the UK economy has once again lost out. Given that the nature and necessity of the Bill has already been discussed at length, I will focus on addressing the two amendments.

During the passage of the Bill, helpful alterations have been made to ensure that it is robust. The Lords amendments before us today seek to address two omissions. We are very disappointed that the Government are not willing to compromise and not willing to heed the wise and expert input of the Lords. That is deeply disappointing, because a great deal could be achieved if the Minister and his Government took note, including from hon. and learned Members on their own side.

Kevin Hollinrake *rose*—

Rushanara Ali: If the Minister is brief, rather than talking the Bill out like he did last time, I will give way.

Kevin Hollinrake: I will be very brief. On the question of compromise, the hon. Lady will have noticed that there was no “failure to prevent” offence when the legislation was first tabled, nor was there an identification doctrine. There has been significant compromise on the Government side. Our preference, clearly, is to move forward in that spirit of compromise. We have achieved a great deal with the Bill, which has moved from under 300 pages to 400 pages. I do not think it is right to say that the Government have not compromised.

Rushanara Ali: When the Minister was a Back Bencher, he was a powerful advocate on the very issues we are discussing today. It is a shame he has been muzzled, but I appreciate that he is in a difficult position. I hope we can have some compromise, but clearly he has not managed to persuade senior members of his Government. I ask the Government to once again carefully consider these amendments, so that we can best tackle the problem of fraud and economic crime.

The Minister highlighted all the problems with the amendments, but I want to talk about their strengths. The noble Lord Garnier's amendment on “failure to prevent” fraud, which exempts small and micro-enterprises, highlights that the criminal law should be uniform and apply to all in a similar way. This is not just a small insignificant amendment, but a change that would significantly alter law enforcement. For context, fraud is the most common crime in the UK, accounting for 41% of all crimes. Introducing a “failure to prevent” offence would help to deter companies from engaging in or facilitating fraud. To fully change corporate behaviour, we must ensure that the offence applies to all companies, regardless of size.

As has been stated on many occasions, since the “failure to prevent” bribery covers all companies, there is no reason why this measure should not also cover businesses of all sizes. It simply creates more discrepancies and confusion for businesses. The size of a business should not determine who is exempt. The Government have touted this exemption as a protection for small businesses against unnecessary red tape, but in reality this carve out deprives small and medium-size enterprises of the defence of having put in place reasonable anti-fraud procedures. Smaller companies will instead be covered only by the fraud offence itself, when large companies would be caught by the lighter “failure to prevent” fraud offence. The introduction of a new “failure to prevent” offence should apply to all, and the corresponding defence of putting in place reasonable defence procedures should be available to all. In effect, through this carve out, the Government are creating an uneven playing field that is biased against smaller companies. The Bill currently leaves large gaps for economic crime to not only persist but flourish, which I know is not the intention of the Minister. The amendment would have gone a long way to addressing those issues. I ask him once again to carefully consider the amendment, rather than reject it.

I want to turn to the amendment from the noble Lord Faulks, on cost protections in civil recovery cases. The amendment gives more discretion to court judges to alter the allocation of legal costs to ensure that extortionate legal fees are not a hindrance to justice. The spirit of the amendment is that it will help to prevent criminals benefiting from the proceeds of crimes, here or around the world. When it comes to cases where enforcement agencies are trying to prosecute high-level, large-scale economic crime, cost orders remain a serious barrier. I know that first-hand from evidence we received when I served on the Treasury Committee, where we conducted two inquiries on these issues. Our enforcement agencies need strong backing if they are to take on fraud, money laundering and other types of economic crime on the largest scale. Right now, the Government should be on the side of our agencies, rather than tying their hands behind their backs. The amendment would

[*Rushanara Ali*]

ensure that criminals, cronies and kleptocrats are not given cover by leaving the back door open for them to spend their way out of justice. That cannot be right. It would ensure that the size of their bank accounts and assets does not give them a guaranteed get out of jail free card just because they can afford to meet any expenses required to support their case. The Minister knows that this is a problem; he has heard evidence of it. He knows that it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

It has been disappointing to observe the Government's lack of willingness to protect our law enforcement. It seems reasonable that a court could have discretion on how to allocate costs, especially when we know of previous cases, one of which resulted in a family's seeking costs amounting to a staggering £1.5 million. That represents 40% of the National Crime Agency's annual budget between 2015 and 2018.

The Bill is almost over the line, and I acknowledge that there have been some improvements, but we could do a great deal more. We have welcomed the Bill and we welcome the Lords amendments, so we are disappointed that the Government continue to fail to support them. We would be in a much better place if there were a compromise. The "failure to prevent" offence is a case in point. For years we have been calling for a replication of the successes of the Bribery Act 2010. Sadly, our capital city has been nicknamed "Londongrad", and is now considered to be a capital where money laundering and fraud are rife. That means that we must do more to tackle these issues, but the Bill provides only part of the solution. The present circumstances require much more radical action than the timidity that we have witnessed both today and in the last Session.

It is saddening that the Government have missed such an important opportunity. We will continue to hold their feet to the fire, but given the lack of compromise, it will be for the next Government—the next Labour Government, I hope—to pick up the pieces and toughen up our response in order to end the corrosive impact of dirty money in our country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the next speaker, let me point out—it may not be obvious—that we only have until 1.51 pm to complete this business. I therefore appeal for brevity. I am not going to impose a time limit, because given that everyone present is a distinguished and experienced Member, we should not need one.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just want to be clear about this. I assume that we can speak until 1.51 pm, and vote after that. Is that correct?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is. Let me say for the purpose of clarity that the right hon. Lady is absolutely correct.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): There has been a great deal of improvement in the Bill, and much of its content is welcome. I recognise that,

and I also recognise what the Minister has said, but I am sorry to say that the dead hand of the Treasury has yet again got in the way of our getting the Bill into the best possible state. Let us be blunt about it. The Government, regrettably, have not moved, which is why I support the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), which I have signed and which, I think, offers a sensible compromise. If it takes longer for the Treasury and other parts of the Government to be persuaded, well and good: let us have a proper review after 12 months. However, a serious issue has arisen, and I want to make two brief points about it.

Let me deal first with the point made in the other place by Lord Garnier about the inherent contradictions in a test of criminality based on the size of an organisation. I can see that there is a proportionality point to be made about very small enterprises, but there is good evidence—and anyone who practises in the field will know—that fraud and other illicit activity are often channelled through smaller companies, and the people in those companies are precisely the people over whom we do need to have a degree of control. Law enforcement is not, with respect, needless bureaucracy; it is fundamental to good business, and I think that that point is regrettably being missed.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It was a point underlined when we heard public evidence on the Bill. People explained to us how a number of different smaller companies might well be set up to become conduits for fraud.

Sir Robert Neill: That is a compelling point, and it accords with the evidence that the Justice Committee was given in relation to our inquiry into fraud in the justice system. The irony is that the Government's current stance may well create a perverse incentive. That is certainly not what the Minister wants, and it is not what anyone in the House ought to want.

The point about cost caps is important as well, but I am particularly exercised about the "failure to prevent" offence. Everyone has argued for that, and we are nearly there. I hoped that the Government, being reasonable, would say, "Let us have a look at it; let us have a commitment in the Bill." I accept that the Minister is an entirely honourable man, and I accept what he says, but I know from personal experience that Ministers do not stay forever. At the end of the day, we want an assurance that this provision will be written into the statute and there will be a review, because it is so important. I beg the Minister to reflect on that. Otherwise, those of us who want to be able to support the Government today will find ourselves in a position where we cannot do so, although there is so little between us. The ability to move just that little bit further would send a much better signal. As it is, the Lords passed these amendments last time with larger majorities than before, and they will be entitled to take note of that in the event that the Bill goes back to them again. I therefore hope that, even at the last minute, the Government will reflect.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Dame Margaret Hodge. I beg your pardon; I call Alison Thewliss.

1.15 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I knew that when you referred to us all as distinguished and experienced Members you did not mean me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This is the third time we have been back here, and I think it incumbent on the Government to listen to the Lords. They have made it clear that they feel strongly about their very reasonable amendments, which shows how important they are and how we should be getting this right. There is no question that, as the Minister suggested, we are going to let the Bill fall today. I think that if he were worried about that he would accept the Lords amendments this afternoon, rather than allowing the process to go on and on. We did not need to be here at the last minute; he could have accepted many of the amendments at a much earlier stage, because fundamentally he agrees with them. We know that, because he said it on many occasions before he took ministerial office. I think that a great deal can be done if the Minister will make that compromise this afternoon.

The notion that 99.5% of businesses can be exempted from the “failure to prevent” offence is absolutely mad. Small businesses are both part of and victims of economic crime. Some figures from UK Finance arrived in our inboxes earlier today. According to its findings, criminals stole £580 million through unauthorised and authorised fraud in just the first half of 2023. UK Finance says that that is a 2% decrease, but it is still a significant amount of money. Businesses as well as individuals are losing out, and the Government should be paying more attention to that.

The Minister described “failure to prevent” as a distraction for business. I wonder if he also thinks, for consistency’s sake, that the “failure to prevent bribery” offence in the Bribery Act 2010 and the “failure to prevent tax evasion” offence in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 are distractions for business. If he thinks that “failure to prevent” economic crime is a distraction for business, he must surely think that those other offences are also an unnecessary bit of bureaucracy that businesses have to carry out. It does not make any sense.

I fully support the level playing field for cost protections. We must give our enforcement agencies both the tools and money to do their job. No enforcement agency should be thinking, “We cannot afford to take on this case. We cannot afford to prosecute these economic criminals.” The Government should be supporting law enforcement, allowing this Lords amendment to go through, and ensuring that we make the best possible legislation. There is no excuse for the Government not to do these things. The Government agree with them, and we in the House agree with them on a cross-party basis. The Government should get on with it, and not return the Bill to the Lords.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I will certainly remember your exhortation to brevity, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you know, that is something of a challenge for me at the best of times.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): No, no.

Sir Robert Buckland: I think my right hon. Friend may suffer from the same affliction, dare I say; but I will draw a veil of charity over that.

My hon. Friend—and my friend—the Minister has campaigned assiduously with us in the trenches on this issue for many years. I yield to none in my admiration for him, and I want to put on record how grateful I am that he is in this place, in that spot, doing the job that he is doing. We have come a long way. I well remember being on the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee giving authorisation for this Bill in the first place, and knowing then that it would require heavy amendment during its course.

It was inevitable that, in the light of the appalling incidents in Ukraine and the changed world situation, the Bill would develop and mature, and mature it has. The identification principle changes are truly radical and reflect a view long held by the Law Commission and others that we needed to update the *Tesco v. Nattrass* principle, which is now 50 years old. I salute the Minister and colleagues in the Lords for making sure that that has happened, but I must press him again about the basis upon which the Government make assertions, very much at the last minute, about the regulatory or administrative cost burdens on small and medium-sized businesses. I do not think that they are going to be as dramatically high as they assert. We have not had proper time to test the estimates, and I do not think that they stand up to scrutiny. They do not reflect the Government’s position on previous “failure to prevent” offences—namely, for tax evasion and bribery—and this begs a huge range of questions.

There is no doubt that my colleagues in the legal profession—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests on every occasion, and I do so now—will feast upon these threshold definitions. Worse than that, unscrupulous operators in the field will exploit these threshold definitions and find clever ways around the law. We know what that means. We will see shell companies and people of straw. We will see the same behaviour that we are rightly trying to eradicate because we want this country to be one of the best places in the world to invest.

This is chiefly an economic argument. Yes, there is a morality to it, but chiefly it is an economic argument. That is why, at the last minute as we come up to Prorogation, I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of the increased majorities in the other place for these amendments and in particular of the attempt we have made to compromise with the Government. At the last minute, I imposed myself upon the goodwill of the Clerks in order to get a further amendment in before the time limit. It was a manuscript amendment to increase the period of one year mentioned in the amendment to 18 months. It has not been selected for debate, but the important political point that we wish to make is that we are seeking at the last minute to come up with reasonable compromises.

I will give the Minister another idea. Bills normally come in with Royal Assent, which we imagine will happen either today or tomorrow with the Prorogation ceremony. Two months is the normal period for Bills to then come into force but he has the power to lay commencement orders to ensure that certain parts of this Bill do not come into force until a statutory instrument has been laid. He has that power, so why not use it in this case and accept the amendment tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge)? He can see that we are commanding

[*Sir Robert Buckland*]

all the ingenuity that we have to come up with reasonable compromises that will allow the Bill to pass in the best possible order. I make a last-minute plea to him to accept these exhortations and not to oppose the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and me. I can say no more to my hon. Friend the Minister, other than to thank him and ask him to go that extra yard.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): This is another leg in a long journey. I want to focus on the amendment that stands in my name, which is supported by the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill).

May I place on the record my thanks to everybody across the House, some of whom are here today, for the way in which we have managed to work together as Members of Parliament and put our political affiliations behind us in trying to find a common-sense, pragmatic way to tackle a horrific problem and to improve the Bill that was laid before us almost a year ago? I also pay special tribute to Members of the House of Lords, who have again worked incredibly hard to improve the Bill in a practical way. In particular, I thank Lord Garnier, Lord Agnew, Lord Vaux and Lord Edward Faulks, all of whom have moved important amendments that have been supported by Members across the House, many of whom are members of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption and responsible tax.

I draw to Members' attention what happened to the amendment to the "failure to prevent" measures. When it was first considered by the House of Lords it was passed by a majority of three. When it was considered a second time, it was passed by a majority of 26. When it was considered a third time, last week, it was passed by a majority of 41. So the strength of feeling in the other place about the importance of the propositions in the Bill simply grew over time, as the argument was heard by more and more members of the House of Lords, and I bet that if it goes back again, it will get through again with an even greater majority. I say to the Minister that people are voting for this and it is not just a partisan issue; Cross-Benchers and members of the Conservative party are either voting or choosing to abstain. That is why we are securing those majorities in the House of Lords.

Our amendment is moved in the spirit of compromise. All we are saying in that amendment is that we would require the Secretary of State to carry out a review a year after Royal Assent, with a report to Parliament within 18 months of Royal Assent, where it would assess the impact of excluding so many businesses from having duties to prevent fraud. It would also look at the impact of that on the incidence of fraud and assess the potential merits of bringing more companies into scope.

I want to take Members back to when the Government promised to introduce a "failure to prevent" offence on the basis of new clauses introduced by the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon and the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst when we considered the Bill on Report. They were detailed new clauses to which we had given great thought. The Government agreed at that point to adopt our proposals on the basis

that we would not seek to divide the House on the issue. We kept our side of the bargain but, sadly, the Government have failed to deliver on their commitment. So Lord Garnier tried valiantly three times to hold the Government to their word, and every time he put it to a vote he got a greater majority in favour of what he was proposing.

This measure was first championed when the Minister was a Back Bencher, as he is well aware. He was the individual on our all-party parliamentary group who argued the case for it with the greatest passion and commitment, so it is especially sad that the effectiveness of the new offence has been so undermined and weakened by the changes he has chosen to make or been forced to make by colleagues in his own Department or in the Treasury. He often argues that we were the first country to introduce a "failure to prevent" offence. I agree with that, but I would simply say to him we are also the jurisdiction of choice for dirty money, so surely we have a duty, more than any other jurisdiction, to lead on reforms and to clamp down on this evil matter.

The Government's changes have substantially weakened the power of the new offence, and the Minister has to accept that. He has taken out the failure to prevent money laundering, and the offence now covers only fraud. He has excluded all medium-sized, small and micro-businesses. That means that his carveout has excluded 99.9% of all businesses. It has excluded two thirds of all the people employed in private enterprise. It has excluded half the turnover that flows through private enterprise. I say to the Minister that this is a missed opportunity by his Government that represents a failure to act firmly and decisively against the scourge of dirty money.

The Government's own report, "National SME Fraud Segmentation", found that medium-sized companies employing between 50 and 250 employees were significantly more likely to experience fraud than larger companies. The Metropolitan police and UK Finance have warned that SMEs are particularly vulnerable to fraud, and the procedures to prevent companies from committing fraud are exactly the same as the procedures to prevent companies from experiencing fraud. Why on earth and on what basis have the Government chosen to excuse them? I cannot understand the logic.

1.30 pm

Some of the most worrying actors that we know are engaged in either conniving or facilitating fraud are now out of scope. If we look just at law firms, we see that only 100 of the 10,400 law firms in Britain today are now likely to be in scope. Just yesterday I had a meeting with Lloyds bank, which described to me a terrible scam relating to house purchases whereby the purchaser has an endless round of emails with the solicitor about all the details of the purchase of a property, but then an email appears changing the bank details to which the purchaser should pay the deposit. As the solicitor does not have the systems in place to check on that, the purchaser pays into a fraudulent account and loses the deposit on the house, which is a massive amount of money. If the solicitor had had those procedures in place, that fraud might never have occurred. I repeat to the Minister that only 100 of the 10,400 law firms in Britain will now be in scope, if the Government's will holds.

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Lady is making very important points. However, the “failure to prevent” offence, as drafted, would not cover that situation, because it covers only situations where the benefit is to the corporation concerned or an officer within it. A situation in which a third party hijacked systems would not be covered, whatever the threshold.

Dame Margaret Hodge: That is an interesting point. The simple response is that, obviously, the drafting of the “failure to prevent” offence needs further improvement to ensure that it covers that sort of instance.

There were similar arguments about the burden on SMEs when we introduced the Bribery Act 2010. In 2015, a survey of SMEs found that nine out of 10 had no concerns or problems with the Act, and 90% also said that it did not affect their ability to export. Although fears are expressed before legislation is introduced, once it is on the statute book people find that it actually helps them. Under the terms of the Bill, SMEs already have an appropriate defence, as the Minister well knows: that they should only take actions that are reasonable in all circumstances. That test of reasonableness would protect microbusinesses and SMEs from having to engage in overly bureaucratic procedures.

Although the argument is overwhelming, the Minister does not agree. We had hoped that the Government would support and accept our amendment. If they were to do so, we would not put all these amendments to the vote. This means that the next Government—a Labour Government, we all hope—will seize the opportunity that the Minister has missed and grasp the issue. Labour will become the anti-corruption champions, saving our country and our economy.

This Bill arrived in a sorry state and we have improved it—I accept that—with the identification doctrine, clauses on strategic lawsuits against public participation, the improvement of accountability with an annual report to Parliament, and the reluctant acceptance that there may be an increase in fees for Companies House. But there are still large gaps. Trusts have not been covered, as they should be, and authorised corporate services providers could end up with a future dud register. Cost caps, which other hon. Members have alluded to, are not in there, the whistleblower regime is not in place, and asset seizure still has to be tackled.

We hear whispers that there is a third economic crime Bill. I am pleased about that, but if we had achieved more with this Bill, we might not have needed another one. After all the work that all of us have done to achieve cross-party consensus, and given the values that we all share, I would hope that the Minister would be bold enough to accept our tiny little compromise and put this Bill to bed so that the proposed legislation could be passed by the time we prorogue.

Liam Byrne: I rise to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), which gives me an opportunity to thank her for her extraordinary leadership on this agenda. Our country is safer and stronger for the work that she has helped lead in this House over a long period.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I am grateful to the Minister for ensuring that, by and large, we have approached this Bill in the spirit of compromise. My

right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, unfortunately, the Bill arrived in this place in a sorry state. Of course, the best way to examine that is to look at the fantastic manifesto of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption and responsible tax, which, of course, the Minister used to co-chair. When I look at that manifesto, which we launched together in Westminster Abbey not too long ago, I see that this Bill covers a fair number of its proposals, but not all of them. That is why something of a mystery still hangs over the Chamber today, and that mystery is that we know that the Minister probably wanted to go much further in this Bill. He has been collegiate enough not to explain to us, either in public or in private, just how his hands were tied and why he has pulled his punches on so many of the policy proposals, including those that we are debating this afternoon.

I want to underline why the “failure to prevent” clauses are so important and why the responsibility for failing to prevent fraud and money laundering should apply to all companies, not just 9% of UK plc. We know, as my right hon. Friend said, that unfortunately this country is now one of the two global centres for money laundering and fraud. That is a badge of shame. There are think-tanks in places such as Washington that now write reports about what they call the UK kleptocracy problem. That is because we have left our financial services and Companies House too weak to police what is a growing problem.

To underline how fast the risk to our country is growing, I asked the House of Commons Library to look at the amount of foreign direct investment that was coming into our country. Foreign direct investment comes into Britain through companies that are set up at a moment’s notice, from UK offshore accounts, from dictatorships and from countries that are only partially free, and the reality is that that money has grown fivefold since 2010. A quarter of a trillion pounds of foreign direct investment has come into Britain from UK offshore accounts, dictatorships and countries that are only partially free. Overwhelmingly, I am sure, that money is clean and good, but we all know in this House that some of it is not. We have a responsibility in this place to make sure that our regime for policing corrupt money is as strong as it possibly can be. This Bill, although it makes progress, still leaves weaknesses in the argument.

The Minister has based his arguments more recently on whether we are creating undue, over-burdensome costs to business. Like him, I was in business previously—I was in the wrong place at the wrong time—and was elected to this place in 2004. I know what it is like to grow a business from two people around a table to a multi-million pound enterprise that employs lots of people. I know about the responsibilities on company directors, but we grant special privileges to company directors in this country and we grant special privileges to companies. That regime was introduced in 1855. When Viscount Palmerston moved that legislation through the House, he said that the Limited Liability Act 1855 was important, because it would act for the common good of the country. Yet, if we have a regime that does not ensure that directors have responsibilities that match those privileges, frankly, that common good is undermined.

As my right hon. Friend said, we already have a regime in this country that bestows some important responsibilities on directors, including the failure to

[Liam Byrne]

prevent bribery and the failure to prevent tax evasion. Therefore, there are already important regulatory requirements on directors, which we as a House have judged to be essential to keep our economy clean. Asking those directors to take one more responsibility, which is to prevent fraud, is not a significant extra burden.

Dame Margaret Hodge: Does my right hon. Friend not agree that if we are to have a successful financial services sector, we will never get it on the back of dirty money? Therefore, it is ever more important that, in relation to both fraud and money laundering, we have a “failure to prevent” offence, which is not about banging up people in prison but about changing the behaviour of companies and those who work in them?

Liam Byrne: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a point of cross-party consensus. I know it is a point of cross-party consensus because it was the Minister who used to use precisely the same argument to argue for some of the changes that we see in the Bill.

We all know that our country does well, because, by and large, we have a reputation for clean trade around the world. When companies file and incorporate in this country, that is a credential that does them well around the world. That is a credential that we must do everything in this House to protect, which is why the amendment is so important. We cannot leave a weakness in our armour as crime and fraud multiplies.

The Minister said that the proposal would be a cost to British business that we could not withstand or sustain, but the truth is that, while it might be a cost to some British businesses, it would also be a saving to British business, to the British economy and to British taxpayers, because it is always cheaper and more effective to prevent fraud in the first place than to have to police it or to prosecute fraud after the event. When 64% of businesses—small businesses—in this country are victims of fraud, we can only imagine how widespread that cost of fraud has now become. That average is much higher than international averages and therefore there is an additional argument that we need to go that one step further to make sure that we are doing everything in our power to prevent fraud from arising in the first place.

All we ask in this amendment is for the Minister to face the facts. He should bring the facts together, put them in a report, assess them, analyse them and present some conclusions to the House. How can we have a situation where the Minister is essentially asking for the freedom to look away? That simply cannot be the basis of good policy. I am grateful to my new colleagues on the Business and Trade Committee who agreed yesterday that we will ask representatives of Companies House to come before us for hearings. Frankly, if the Minister is not prepared to put the facts around fraud in one place, I shall ask the Select Committee to do the job for him.

Kevin Hollinrake: With the leave of the House, I wish to thank Members who have contributed to the debate. We have much in common, despite the fact that some small differences still remain. As I said earlier, the Government have come a long way since the original tabling of the legislation. The number of pages have

increased by more than 100, so the contents of the Bill now stand at nearly 400, which shows the importance of the legislation that we are debating.

I did not agree with the shadow Minister when she said that the Government have not been willing to compromise—that is not the case at all. The “failure to prevent” offence, particularly the identification doctrine, are key, world-leading measures. In my opening remarks, I made the commitment—and I make it again—that will we keep this matter under review, and that includes, in particular, the threshold. Even if there were a requirement for review in statute, there is no requirement on the Government to make changes following that review, so it is important to maintain the goodwill that we have experienced during the passage of the Bill.

1.45 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge: Perhaps the Minister can tell me what he means when he says that he will keep this matter under review. What precisely does that mean?

Kevin Hollinrake: The way that we have legislated here, and the reason for doing so in that way, have always been informed by information that has come from third parties—from Spotlight on Corruption, Transparency International and others—that have been interested in the Bill. The right hon. Lady and I have worked together on this issue in the past in various all-party groups. Those are the kind of bodies that will inform progress as we implement this legislation, which again I say is world leading.

The shadow Minister talked about a level playing field and said that these measures move away from that. I could not disagree more. The key thing is that we do not have a level playing field now. In small companies, it is much easier to identify who is responsible for a fraud. That is why it is more difficult in large companies, which is why we are applying this to large companies. Fraud is fraud whatever the size of the company. This legislation does not allow smaller or medium-sized companies to facilitate fraud—if they are guilty of fraud, they are guilty of fraud and it is far easier to identify the people concerned.

Let me address the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and thank him for all the work that he has done on this legislation and on the Justice Committee. I ask him not to doubt my motives; I have not been influenced by the Treasury at all. I am influenced by wanting to do the right thing in terms of both tackling economic crime and making sure that we do not put undue burdens on businesses. I can assure him that, for as long as I am in this role, we will keep this under review and make sure that the threshold is fit for purpose.

My hon. Friend talks about good business, but it is good business to make sure that we do not put undue burdens on business. I can promise him that, from my experience—while I was chief executive of my company—we implemented the rules on bribery and tax evasion, which were significant in our business. These would be significant measures for businesses. I say to him and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) that they will have a real impact on businesses and significant costs of implementation. I do not think that

they would be proportionate or needed within smaller enterprises, because of the ease of identifying the people responsible if fraud were facilitated in an organisation.

I appreciate the kind words of my right hon. and learned Friend and the work that he has done. I remember lobbying him on this issue when he was the Secretary of State for Justice—and a fine job he did. We have got much further this time than we did at that time, which shows our collegiate way of working all the way through the Bill's passage.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) has also done fantastic work in this area, and I appreciate all her efforts. She says that we do not agree. We have a right to disagree where we disagree, and we honestly disagree about whether this proposal is required. We do not want to put unnecessary burdens on businesses.

I completely understand the strength of feeling of the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) on this matter. I, too, feel strongly about implementing the right measures to tackle economic crime while not putting undue burdens on businesses, so I say to her again, in the spirit of good will that we have operated under for many years, we will keep this under review. If the threshold needs to be changed, we can do that under secondary legislation.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) on his election as Chair of the Business and Trade Committee. I know that he will do a fine job. He is right that, in that spirit of good will, we have achieved much in the manifesto that we launched just over the road. Again, I hope that he does not doubt my motives in what we are doing to tackle economic crime without putting undue burdens on business.

I urge everyone to support the measures that we have in place already, and I ask those in the other place to respect the clear will of this House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 208, Noes 274.

Division No. 349]

[1.49 pm

AYES

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Abrahams, Debbie | Callaghan, Amy (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>) |
| Ali, Rushanara | Campbell, rh Sir Alan |
| Anderson, Fleur | Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair |
| Ashworth, rh Jonathan | Champion, Sarah |
| Barker, Paula | Chapman, Douglas |
| Baron, Mr John | Cherry, Joanna |
| Beckett, rh Margaret | Cooper, Daisy |
| Begum, Apsana | Cooper, rh Yvette |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Corbyn, rh Jeremy |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Cowan, Ronnie |
| Blackford, rh Ian | Creasy, Stella |
| Blackman, Kirsty | Cruddas, Jon |
| Blomfield, Paul | Cryer, John |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Cunningham, Alex |
| Brock, Deidre | Daby, Janet |
| Brown, Alan | Davey, rh Ed |
| Brown, Ms Lyn | David, Wayne |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Davies-Jones, Alex |
| Buck, Ms Karen | De Cordova, Marsha |
| Buckland, rh Sir Robert | Debbonaire, Thangam |
| Burgon, Richard | Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh |
| Butler, Dawn | Dixon, Samantha |
| Byrne, Ian | Docherty-Hughes, Martin |
| Byrne, rh Liam | Dodds, Anneliese |
| Cadbury, Ruth | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Doogan, Dave | Madders, Justin |
| Dorans, Allan (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>) | Mahmood, Mr Khalid |
| Doughty, Stephen | Mahmood, Shabana |
| Dowd, Peter | Malhotra, Seema |
| Duffield, Rosie | Mather, Keir |
| Dyke, Sarah | McCabe, Steve |
| Eagle, rh Maria | McCarthy, Kerry |
| Eastwood, Colum | McDonagh, Siobhain |
| Edwards, Jonathan | McDonald, Andy |
| Edwards, Sarah | McDonald, Stuart C. |
| Efford, Clive | McDonnell, rh John |
| Elliott, Julie | McFadden, rh Mr Pat |
| Elmore, Chris | McGovern, Alison |
| Eshalomi, Florence | McKinnell, Catherine |
| Esterson, Bill | McLaughlin, Anne |
| Evans, Chris | McMahon, Jim |
| Farron, Tim | McMorrin, Anna |
| Fellows, Marion | Miliband, rh Edward |
| Fletcher, Colleen | Mishra, Navendu |
| Foord, Richard | Monaghan, Carol |
| Fovargue, Yvonne | Morden, Jessica |
| Foxcroft, Vicky | Morgan, Helen |
| Foy, Mary Kelly | Morgan, Stephen |
| Gibson, Patricia | Morris, Grahame |
| Gill, Preet Kaur | Murray, James |
| Glindon, Mary | Nandy, Lisa |
| Grant, Peter | Neill, Sir Robert |
| Green, Sarah | Newlands, Gavin |
| Greenwood, Margaret | Nichols, Charlotte |
| Griffith, Dame Nia | Nicolson, John (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>) |
| Gwynne, Andrew | Norris, Alex |
| Hamilton, Fabian | O'Hara, Brendan |
| Hanvey, Neale | Onwurah, Chi |
| Hardy, Emma | Oppong-Asare, Abena |
| Harris, Carolyn | Osborne, Kate |
| Hayes, Helen | Oswald, Kirsten |
| Hendrick, Sir Mark | Owen, Sarah |
| Hobhouse, Wera | Peacock, Stephanie |
| Hodge, rh Dame Margaret | Pennycook, Matthew |
| Hodgson, Mrs Sharon | Phillips, Jess |
| Hollern, Kate | Powell, Lucy |
| Hopkins, Rachel | Qaisar, Ms Anum |
| Hosie, rh Stewart | Qureshi, Yasmin |
| Howarth, rh Sir George | Rayner, rh Angela |
| Huq, Dr Rupa | Reeves, Ellie |
| Hussain, Imran | Reeves, rh Rachel |
| Jarvis, Dan | Rimmer, Ms Marie |
| Johnson, rh Dame Diana | Rodda, Matt |
| Johnson, Kim | Russell-Moyle, Lloyd |
| Jones, Darren | Saville Roberts, rh Liz |
| Jones, rh Mr Kevan | Shah, Naz |
| Jones, Ruth | Shanks, Michael |
| Jones, Sarah | Sheppard, Tommy |
| Kane, Mike | Siddiq, Tulip |
| Keeley, Barbara | Slaughter, Andy |
| Kendall, Liz | Smith, Jeff |
| Khan, Afzal | Smith, Nick |
| Kinnock, Stephen | Smyth, Karin |
| Kyle, Peter | Sobel, Alex |
| Lake, Ben | Spellar, rh John |
| Lavery, Ian | Stephens, Chris |
| Law, Chris | Stevens, Jo |
| Leadbeater, Kim | Stone, Jamie |
| Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma | Strathern, Alistair |
| Lewis, Clive | Sultana, Zarah |
| Lightwood, Simon | Tami, rh Mark |
| Linden, David | Tarry, Sam |
| Lloyd, Tony | Thewliss, Alison |
| Lucas, Caroline | Thomas, Gareth |
| Lynch, Holly | Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick |
| MacNeil, Angus Brendan | Thomson, Richard |

Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew

Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Tonia Antoniazzi

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.

Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy
vote cast by Mr Marcus
Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
Hart, rh Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Kim
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Loder, Chris
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David

Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt

Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Joy Morrissey and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. Before we proceed to the next Division, I must inform the House that it has been drawn to my attention that the election for the Defence Committee Chairman in the Aye Lobby was due to be open until 2 pm. That, of course, was interrupted by the Division, and I understand that one or two tardy Members have yet to vote.

Hon. Members: Shame! Name them!

Mr Deputy Speaker: I could, but I won't. Following the end of all the Divisions, and time having been allowed for the necessary facilities to be reinstated, the ballot will be open again for the time lost: a further 11 minutes. You have been warned.

2.4 pm

More than one hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 4 September). The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83G).

Main Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 207.

Division No. 350]

[2.4 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben

Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot

Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy
vote cast by Mr Marcus
Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon

Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyins, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy

Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben

Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Scott Mann

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Baron, Mr John
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam

Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony

Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mather, Keir
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shanks, Michael
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughtier, Andy
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison

Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine

Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Tonia Antoniazzi and
Gerald Jones

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House insists on its Amendment 151A and disagrees with the Lords in their Amendments 151E and 151F.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. There is no end to the variety and excitement that this House can offer. I am advised that the Order Paper, which we all know is gospel, says that the Defence Committee ballot should close not at 2 o'clock but at 2.30, so at least two Members—I know them both—will have another 41 minutes to vote after the next Division. Actually, it will be 45 minutes because, I am told, the facilities had to be cleared and will no doubt have to be reinstated. I suggest that Members who have not voted do so fairly quickly.

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House insists on its amendment 161A and disagrees with Lords amendment 161D.—(Kevin Hollinrake.)

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 208.

Division No. 351]

[2.19 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Browne, Anthony

Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims

Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel

Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyins, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherylyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti

Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Joy Morrissey and
Scott Mann**

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Baron, Mr John
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote
cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast
by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, rh Maria

Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mather, Keir
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote
cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shanks, Michael
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew

Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete

Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Tonia Antoniazzi and
Gerald Jones

Question accordingly agreed to.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you know, the House will later vote on the issue of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and the Independent Expert Panel's report. Of course, we do not have a chance to debate the issue, the content, or the pros and cons of that report: we merely vote on it.

It is in that context that I wish to raise with you a report on the BBC this morning, entitled "Peter Bone: Abuse by MP left me broken, former aide says", which contains a very extensive, one-sided attack on the hon. Member for Wellingborough. This is not in any way to judge the rights and wrongs of this matter, but merely to put the principles of natural justice first. It is an anonymous briefing against a named Member of Parliament on a day on which, as the BBC accepted, MPs would be voting on this issue.

What I would like to know from you, Mr Deputy Speaker, is whether this is an undue attempt to influence Members of Parliament on the day of a vote that should be our business in this House, and indeed, whether it is an attempt to manipulate Members of Parliament. This does not just relate to this case, but to any case that we may have to consider in the future. I would like to ask you to ask Mr Speaker, who has

always defended the rights of this House, whether he will take legal advice on whether this particular report today constitutes contempt for the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that I am not in a position to answer the specific question that he raises, but I do know that the director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation will be in this building later today, and if Mr Speaker chooses to ask to see him, I imagine that he will make himself available. I also know that Mr Speaker takes this very seriously indeed, and that legal advice is being sought.

NON-DOMESTIC RATING BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Non-Domestic Rating Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 24 April 2023 (Non-Domestic Rating Bill: Programme):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Julie Marson.*)

Question agreed to.

Non-Domestic Rating Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendment 1. If Lords amendment 1 is agreed to, I will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered into the *Journal*.

Clause 13

REQUIREMENTS FOR RATEPAYERS ETC TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

2.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments 2 and 3.

Lee Rowley: It is a pleasure to return this Bill to this place after its positive reception, both here initially and in the other place more recently. Reforming business rates was a manifesto commitment, and having concluded our review of rates, the Bill seeks to deliver a fairer and more effective business rates system.

The amendments that the Government invite the House to support today are minor and do not change the policy intentions of the Bill, which we have debated before in this place. Two amendments deal with the penalties regime for the new duty on ratepayers in clause 13—they are designed to ensure that the penalties system is fairer—and the third is a minor and technical amendment that removes some obsolete wording as a result of another part of the Bill. I will deal with each amendment briefly.

Lords amendment 1 concerns the civil penalties that the Valuation Office Agency can apply if ratepayers do not provide information under the duty. These include an additional daily penalty of £60, which may only be applied if a ratepayer persistently fails to meet their obligations following an initial penalty notice. The Government have listened to the views of the experts in the other place and agreed to create an additional safeguard for ratepayers by capping the financial value of penalties that can be imposed under this provision. Daily penalties will be capped at £1,800, equivalent to 30 days' worth of penalties. This change will also bring the valuation duty in line with the separate duty to provide His Majesty's Revenue and Customs with a taxpayer reference number, for which a cap on penalties is already in place.

Lords amendment 2 concerns the penalty for the criminal offence of knowingly or recklessly making a false statement, an offence that is subject to higher penalties than simply failing to comply. The Bill prescribes that for a higher penalty to be applied, the VOA must be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the ratepayer has made the false statement knowingly or recklessly. Having reflected, we have recognised that we need to apply the same burden of proof to the procedure on appeal. The amendment therefore provides that the

valuation tribunal must remit a penalty unless it is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the ratepayer has knowingly or recklessly made a false statement. This provides additional protection for ratepayers.

Finally, Lords amendment 3 is a minor and technical change to the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as a consequential effect of the provisions in the Bill concerning business rates multipliers. This is simply a drafting correction to improve the clarity of the statute book, and the Government do not foresee any practical effect.

The Government invite the House to agree to three minor amendments that were unanimously supported in the other place. Lords amendments 1 and 2 refine and improve the compliance framework for the new information duty, and Lords amendment 3 is a minor consequential change to improve the clarity of the statute book. I commend them to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the Opposition Front Bench.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to respond to these three Lords amendments on behalf of the Opposition. Clause 13 of the Bill introduces new duties on ratepayers to provide information to the Valuation Office Agency in order to support digitisation and a shorter revaluation cycle. It also introduces penalties to promote compliance and establishes an associated appeal system.

Through the Bill, ratepayers will initially face a penalty for failing to comply with the new duties the Bill introduces. If, having received that initial penalty, the ratepayer continues not to comply for a further 30 days, they will be liable for an additional penalty of £60 per day. As we heard from the Minister, Lords amendment 1 caps the total charge arising from that additional penalty at £1,800, equivalent to 30 days' worth of daily fines. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) said on Second Reading, we are aware of concerns relating to the new duty and the associated penalties from those representing shops, and small shops in particular. Although I doubt that all the concerns of those representative organisations and their members have been addressed by the Government, we realise that this limit on the level of the penalty may help to protect ratepayers from much larger charges while still supporting the Valuation Office Agency's move toward frequent revaluations, which we support. On that basis, we will not be opposing its inclusion in the Bill.

Through clause 13, the Bill also introduces a new criminal penalty, which applies if a person makes a false statement while purporting to comply with the new duties it introduces. The Bill sets out that the Valuation Office Agency will decide whether an offence has been committed, and its decision may be appealed to the Valuation Tribunal for England. As originally drafted, the Bill permits the tribunal to remit such a penalty when it is not satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the person had knowingly or recklessly made a false statement. Lords amendment 2 would require, rather than merely permit, the tribunal to remit the penalty in such circumstances. We believe that the amendment is sensible, so we will not be opposing its inclusion in the Bill.

Finally, Lords amendment 3 makes a technical change to the Local Government Finance Act 1988, omitting section 140(2)(b) of that Act. That section, which refers to Ministers making separate estimates of rateable value for England and Wales, has become obsolete as a result of clause 15 of the Bill, which makes a separate provision about the calculation of multipliers for England. As this is essentially a drafting amendment, we will not be opposing it either.

I am tempted to talk at much greater length about Labour's plans to scrap the current system of business rates, replacing it with a system of business property tax that rebalances the burden of business property taxation away from the high street and retail firms towards online tech giants. However, I realise that that may be out of scope and that time is tight, so I will simply confirm our intention not to oppose any of these three amendments.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): This Bill, unlike the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, on which we considered a further round of Lords amendments yesterday, has progressed through Parliament quickly. Second Reading in this place took place on 24 April, and the Bill will complete its passage today or tomorrow. It was a 2019 Conservative manifesto commitment to carry out a fundamental review of the business rates system. This Bill is the start of that process, but it does not mark its completion, and on its own it cannot be described as fundamental.

The amendments before us are straightforward. Lords amendment 3 is a drafting correction to omit a requirement relating to Wales that is now obsolete. Lords amendments 1 and 2 relate to the new duty to notify. They cap the level of, and increase the burden of proof required for, penalties that will be applied for not complying with the obligation to give required information to the Valuation Office Agency. They are to be welcomed, but as highlighted on Report, this burden should have been much reduced and there should be reciprocal penalties on the VOA.

As I have mentioned, this Bill must mark the beginning of the reform of business rates, not the completion of the task. Business rates remain a heavy and uncertain burden on many businesses. They act as a brake on growth, disincentivise capital investments and are a barrier to levelling up. Reform must be more radical and must be carried out much more quickly.

I urge the Government to strive towards achieving the following goals. First, the uniform business rate multiplier must be reduced to an affordable level. The UBR currently sits at 51p in the pound. At such a high level, it deters investment and ultimately reduces the tax base. It should be reduced to the order of 34p, the level at which it was first introduced in 1990. Lowering the UBR would have the long-term effect of expanding the tax base. A failure to do this will ultimately see the Government increasing the UBR on an ever-shrinking tax base, and in doing so, threatening a vital source of local government revenue.

Secondly, as important as they are to so many businesses, we ultimately need to remove the myriad sticking plaster reliefs that are invariably lobbied for and announced at every spring Budget and autumn statement. They are an implicit admission that the UBR is too high. The Government have been forced to offer many of these reliefs as many businesses are unable to pay a UBR of

51p. By removing these reliefs and reducing the UBR, the Government would simplify the system and reduce the administrative burden on both ratepayers and the VOA. Instead of the annual cliff edges, as businesses lobby for and then nervously wait for a relief to be extended, such a reform would introduce an element of long-term certainty, which would encourage investment.

Finally, while the Government have taken a welcome step in the right direction by moving to three-year revaluations, they must keep going towards the ultimate goal of annual valuations. Shorter valuations are necessary to ensure that business rates respond to the dynamic and increasingly volatile movements of the market. It is vital that rateable values are assessed as frequently as possible to ensure that ratepayers are paying a fair amount.

My last point is to express regret at the curtailment in the definition of a "material change of circumstances". This is a provision that gives ratepayers recourse to pursue a relief on their business rates bills when circumstances outside their control hinder their ability to run their businesses. Despite the Government's protestations, the Bill in effect disappplies many common situations of material change that up to now have been acknowledged as such and are even described in the VOA's own guidance.

In conclusion, this is the start of the reform of business rates, but it is not the finish. There is some way to go before we reach that Magnus Magnusson moment. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for listening to my concerns during the passage of this Bill, and I am grateful to him for meeting me last month to discuss the situation. I have subsequently written to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury setting out some ideas as to how this reform process can be continued. I would be grateful if he and she committed to completing the task of the fundamental review of business rates that is so vital for businesses large and small all around the UK.

2.45 pm

Lee Rowley: I will not seek to detain the House for any more than a few seconds. I express my gratitude to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray), for his constructive comments and his willingness to support the amendments, as well as for resisting the temptation to go over again some of the things we have talked about in previous iterations of this Bill.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who has been involved since the beginning. He has done the House a significant service in both reviewing the Bill and offering his comments during its passage. As he says, this is a significant change and one that I think everybody accepts is a big leap forward, particularly on the revaluation frequency moving from five to three years. While we are on the subject of late 1990s game shows, although in his view we have not yet finished this matter—I accept that we never finish—we are grateful for his "Mastermind" qualities in looking at this Bill over the past few months.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 and 3 agreed to.

**ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES
(OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL
(PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)**

Ordered,

That the Order of 3 July 2023 (Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill Programme) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Julie Marson.*)

**Economic Activity of Public Bodies
(Overseas Matters) Bill**

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

**IMPACT ASSESSMENT: TRADE AND
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

“(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office must conduct an impact assessment of this Act’s impact on the United Kingdom’s trade and diplomatic relations with the following countries—

- (a) Afghanistan;
- (b) Bangladesh;
- (c) Belarus;
- (d) Central African Republic;
- (e) China;
- (f) Colombia;
- (g) Democratic People’s Republic of Korea;
- (h) Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- (i) Egypt;
- (j) Eritrea;
- (k) Ethiopia;
- (l) Haiti;
- (m) Iran;
- (n) Iraq;
- (o) Libya;
- (p) Mali;
- (q) Myanmar (Burma);
- (r) Nicaragua;
- (s) Occupied Palestinian Territories;
- (t) Pakistan;
- (u) Russia;
- (v) Saudi Arabia;
- (w) Somalia;
- (x) South Sudan;
- (y) Sri Lanka;
- (z) Sudan;
- (aa) Syria;
- (ab) Turkmenistan;
- (ac) Uzbekistan;
- (ad) Venezuela;
- (ae) Yemen;
- (af) Zimbabwe.

(2) The Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office must produce a report on the outcome of the impact assessment.

(3) The report mentioned in subsection (2) must be laid before Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the impact assessment has been conducted.”—(*Chris Stephens.*)

This new clause would require the Government to undertake an assessment of the impact of the Act on the UK’s trade and diplomatic relations with the countries identified by the FCDO as human rights priority countries.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.48 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Economic impact assessment for Wales*—

“Within three months of the passage of this Act, the Minister for the Cabinet Office must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the Act on the economy in Wales.”

New clause 3—*Assessment of the impact of the Act on the provision of food compliant with religious dietary beliefs and on the prevention of discrimination*—

“Within six months of the passage of this Act, a Minister of the Crown must lay before Parliament a statement on their assessment of the impact of the Act on—

- (a) the procurement of food meeting religious dietary beliefs, and
- (b) the prevention of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.”

Amendment 12, in clause 1, page 1, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) But subsection (2) does not have effect in relation to a decision which falls within the competency of Senedd Cymru unless Senedd Cymru has passed a resolution granting its consent to the application of that subsection to such decisions.”

This amendment would require the consent of Senedd Cymru for the Bill to apply to decisions within the sphere of Welsh devolved legislative competence.

Amendment 26, page 1, line 5, leave out “must not have regard to a territorial consideration” and insert “must not act”.

This amendment, and Amendment 27, would remove the reference to a “territorial consideration” in the legislation.

Amendment 36, page 1, line 6, leave out from “would” to “was” in line 7, and insert “is”.

This amendment is to probe the use of a subjective, rather than an objective, test to establish whether a decision-maker has contravened clause 1.

Amendment 35, page 1, line 6, leave out from “that” to “influenced” in line 7 and insert “is”.

This amendment is to probe the use of a subjective, rather than an objective, test to establish whether a decision-maker has contravened clause 1.

Amendment 27, page 1, line 9, leave out subsection (3).

This amendment, and Amendment 26, would remove the reference to a “territorial consideration” in the legislation.

Amendment 37, page 1, leave out lines 20 to 22.

This amendment is to probe the impact of the legislation on individuals, such as those working within public authorities.

Amendment 34, in clause 2, page 2, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) But section 1 does not apply to decisions of Scottish Ministers.”

This amendment would remove decisions of Scottish Ministers from the scope of the Bill.

Amendment 14, in clause 3, page 2, line 17, leave out subsections (2) and (3).

This amendment would remove provisions allowing Ministers to amend the Schedule, via regulations, to add a description of decision or consideration, or amend or remove considerations added under previous regulations.

Amendment 18, page 2, line 28, leave out paragraph (b).

This amendment, and Amendments 19 and 20, seek to remove Scotland from the extent of this Bill.

Amendment 13, page 2, line 40, at end insert—

“(4A) Section 1 does not apply to a decision which has

been made in accordance with a Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights.

(4B) A Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights—

- (a) is a public authority’s policy criteria relating to disinvestment in cases concerning contravention of human rights; and
- (b) must be applied consistently by the public authority to all foreign countries.

(4C) Within 60 days of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish, and lay before Parliament, guidance on the form, content and application of Statements for the purposes of this section

(4D) Public authorities must have regard to the guidance referenced in subsection (4C) when devising a Statement.”

This amendment would exempt public bodies from the prohibition in section 1, where the decision has been made in accordance with a Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights. A Statement may not single out individual nations, but would have to be applied consistently, and in accordance with guidance published by the Secretary of State.

Amendment 7, page 3, line 7, leave out subsection (7).

This amendment would remove the prohibition on the Government specifying Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the Occupied Golan Heights as a country or territory to which the prohibition on boycotts does not apply, meaning they are treated just as all other countries and territories.

Amendment 21, page 3, line 11, leave out paragraphs (b) and (c).

This amendment would remove the existing stipulation that the power to exempt a country or territory from section 1 may not be used in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the Occupied Golan Heights.

Amendment 2, page 3, line 13, leave out clause 4.

Amendment 3, in clause 4, page 3, line 18, leave out paragraph (b).

This amendment would remove the prohibition on a person publishing a statement indicating that they would have acted in a way prohibited by clause 1 if it were legal to do so.

Amendment 16, page 3, line 24, at end insert—

“(4) This section does not apply to—

- (a) a local authority,
- (b) an elected mayor of a local authority
- (c) a mayor for the area of a combined authority,
- (d) the Mayor of London,
- (e) the London Assembly
- (f) the Scottish Parliament, or
- (g) Senedd Cymru.”

This amendment would exempt elected bodies from the prohibition on making public statements indicating that they intend to, or would intend to if it were lawful, act in a way that would contravene section 1.

Amendment 28, page 3, line 24, at end insert—

“(4) Nothing in this section requires any act or omission that conflicts with the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Human Rights Act 1998.”

This amendment would ensure that any act or omission under the “gagging clause” in clause 4 would not conflict with the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA), in particular, Article 10 (right to freedom of expression) and Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the ECHR as incorporated by the HRA.

Amendment 29, in clause 7, page 5, line 8, leave out “, or is about to make”.

This amendment, together with Amendments 30 to 33, would remove the ability of information notices and compliance notices to be given to public bodies prior to an actual contravention of the ban.

Amendment 30, page 5, line 12, leave out “, or is likely to contravene”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 29.

Amendment 31, page 5, line 15, leave out “, or is about to publish”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 29.

Amendment 32, page 5, line 18, leave out “, or is likely to contravene”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 29.

Amendment 38, page 5, line 39, leave out from “legislation” to the end of line 41.

This amendment is to probe the way the legislation appears to “qualify” the data protection legislation.

Amendment 33, in clause 8, page 6, line 6, leave out “, or is likely to contravene”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 29.

Amendment 4, in clause 12, page 8, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) But section 1 does not apply in relation to a fund investment decision made by such a manager if the decision has been approved by a majority of those voting in a ballot of the members of the fund; and section 4 does not apply to any statement—

- (a) made for the purpose of preparing for or explaining the purpose of such a ballot;
- (b) concerning a decision which has been approved by such a ballot.”

This amendment would allow a local government pension fund to act in a way prohibited by clause 1 if the decision to do so is approved by a majority of scheme members, and would prevent statements about or following such a ballot being prohibited by clause 4.

Amendment 19, in clause 17, page 10, line 38, leave out “Scotland”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 20, page 11, line 19, leave out “Scotland”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 5, in the schedule, page 12, line 21, at end insert—

“3A Section 1 does not apply to—

- (a) a registered higher education provider in England, as defined by section 3(10) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017;
- (b) an institution within the higher education sector in Wales, as defined by section 91 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992;
- (c) an institution within the higher education sector in Scotland, as defined by section 56 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992;
- (d) a higher education institution in Northern Ireland, as defined by article 30 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.”

This amendment would remove universities and other higher education providers from the requirement to act in accordance with clause 1.

Amendment 6, page 13, line 5, at end insert—

“6A Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as it relates to conduct which it is the position of His Majesty’s Government represents a breach of international law.”

This amendment would permit decisions which would otherwise be in breach of clause 1 if they are taken in response to conduct which the Government considers to be a breach of international law.

Amendment 17, page 13, line 5, at end insert—

“6A Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as the purpose of the decision is to prevent violations of international law including the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, the imposition of collective punishment on civilian populations, forced transfer of civilians, and other acts which may constitute war crimes.”

Amendment 22, page 13, line 5, at end insert—

“(2) Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as the decision-maker reasonably considers it relevant to whether the decision (or anything done further to it) would give financial, economic, or other reward to a party that has engaged in breaching international law, where that breach of international law is directly related to the decision.”

Amendment 8, page 15, line 22, at end insert “, environmental protection, environmental targets, environmental treaties or environmental law (as defined by the Environment Act 2021).”

This amendment would expand the environmental grounds on which a public body is allowed to make certain economic decisions.

Amendment 9, page 15, line 26, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert—

- “(a) reduces the level of environmental protection, including in a country or territory other than the United Kingdom, or
- (b) caused, or had the potential to cause, harm to the natural environment, including the life and health of—
 - (i) plants, wild animals and other living organisms,
 - (ii) their habitats, or
 - (iii) land (except buildings or other structures), air and water,
 and the natural systems, cycles and processes through which they interact.”

This amendment extends the definition of environment misconduct to include damage regardless of whether it is legal or illegal, and to include species, habitats and the natural world.

Amendment 10, page 15, line 29, at end insert “and the welfare of animals”

This amendment would add conduct causing, or having the potential to cause, significant harm to the welfare of animals to the types of conduct which constitute environmental misconduct and to which regard may therefore be had without contravening section 1.

Amendment 11, page 15, line 29, at end insert—

- “(4) The conduct referenced in sub-paragraph (3) includes conduct which amounts to—
 - (a) an offence under section 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 or 13 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and
 - (b) an infringement or contravention of any of the requirements or prohibitions in Schedule 1 of the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations 2015.”

This amendment would clarify the meaning of “welfare of animals” for the purpose of Amendment 10.

Amendment 15, page 15, line 29, at end insert—

“11 Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as it relates to the use of fossil fuels.”

This amendment would allow for a public body to consider the use of fossil fuels when taking certain economic decisions.

Amendment 23, page 15, line 29, at end insert—

“11 Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as the decision-maker reasonably considers it relevant to whether the decision (or anything done further to it) would give financial, economic, or other

reward to a party that has engaged in the crime of genocide as determined under international law, where that crime of genocide is directly related to the decision.”

Amendment 24, page 15, line 29, at end insert—

“11 Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as the decision-maker reasonably considers it relevant to whether the decision (or anything done further to it) would give financial, economic, or other reward to a party that has engaged in the crime of ethnic cleansing as determined under international law, where that ethnic cleansing is directly related to the decision.”

Amendment 25, page 15, line 29, at end insert—

“11 Section 1 does not prevent regard to a consideration so far as the decision-maker reasonably considers it relevant to whether the decision (or anything done further to it) would give financial, economic, or other reward to a party that has engaged in the crime of apartheid as determined under international law, where that crime of apartheid is directly related to the decision.”

I call Anum Qaisar.

Chris Stephens *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker: I beg the hon. Member’s pardon—Chris Stephens.

Chris Stephens: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I forgive you for that after your excellent address to the all-party parliamentary group on Cyprus last night; it was an excellent event.

I rise to speak to the amendments in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar). I indicate now that I will be looking to divide the House on amendment 28, to which I will confine most of my remarks. However, many in this House are deeply disappointed at what the Government are doing in proceeding with this Bill. As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) said on Monday,

“now is not the time.”—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 611.]

Let me say at the outset that we all condemn the killing of innocent civilians. We do condemn Hamas and their acts of terror on 7 October, and Hamas must release all hostages. We must equally recognise that there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and it is legitimate to question the actions of the Israeli Government. It is perfectly legitimate to call for a ceasefire to address that crisis and let humanitarian aid flow in to save the lives of innocent Palestinian people.

There are vastly more people around these islands who are perplexed by the Government’s playing party political games when the middle east is in crisis and the rest of the world fears the start of an even broader conflict. This is not the time to seek electoral advantage through tripping up political opponents during semantic exchanges, exploiting small differences in language to pretend there is a vast gulf between positions, or selling that to the electorate as “one party good, all other parties bad.”

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I commend the hon. Gentleman on the way he is making his comments. Does he agree that it is positively dangerous to do what this Government are doing when we see the huge rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia? Just now, our communities need us in Parliament to be showing a lead and to be united on this, and not to do something that is so divisive and so deliberately provocative and deeply damaging to the unity of our communities.

Chris Stephens: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention, and I hope that those on the Government Benches listened to her. Many of us have that real fear. This is not the occasion to push forward this legislation. Polarisation is a game that has long been played by the Government, but this is not a game; this is real life, or the loss of it, and such cynicism has no place here. In Israel and Palestine, we have two peoples who feel that they are under existential threat from the other. Almost everyone understands that, and we have all been trying to find solutions that will bring peace to that region. Ringfencing the interests of one group by diminishing the rights of the other can never yield a long-term solution to the entrenched problems in the middle east; it simply exacerbates the tension between the two. The very real fear, which the hon. Member has just expressed, is that it forces people into one camp or the other, it feeds hatred and it fuels the evil that is antisemitism.

It is not too late to withdraw the Bill. If the Government are determined to proceed with it, I hope they listen to the advice from both sides of the House, in particular from Government Back Benchers, and amend the clauses that will otherwise further inflame the divisions that the Government claim they are trying to heal. As with most conflicts, verbal and military, there tends to be collateral damage that has either not been fully anticipated or where the perpetrator simply does not care about the consequences. In their assumed aim of defending the rights of Israel, the Government are attacking the rights of many sectors of our own society, ranging from the legislative and judicial rights of the devolved Parliaments to the democratic rights of elected local authorities, and cutting a swathe through the individual human rights of all people across these islands.

In its long title, the Bill is described as:

“A Bill to make provision to prevent public bodies from being influenced by political or moral disapproval of foreign states when taking certain economic decisions”.

It would appear that public bodies are not fit to make political or moral judgments and, as we will see later, individuals are not fit to make such judgments either. As I said in an earlier debate, the electorate will not miss the irony of a Tory Government presenting themselves as the sole moral arbiter for the whole of these islands.

The pretext for introducing this legislation was an assumed need to respond robustly to the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement—or BDS—which advocates a complete boycott of Israel and Israeli people and which suggests that the state of Israel does not even have the right to exist. The Government ignore the fact that, in line with other Governments in Europe and the EU itself, the Scottish Government and the SNP unequivocally condemn and distance themselves from members or affiliates within the BDS movement. Rather than wish the state of Israel to cease to exist, most democratic countries are strong supporters of a two-state solution, with the Government reasserting that position to the House earlier this year, and President Biden reaffirming support only last week. We as a House are generally united in supporting a two-state solution, and to imply otherwise is a red herring and a dangerous distraction to mature debate.

More than 40 Israeli non-governmental organisations have called for this Bill to be rejected, as has the Union of Jewish Students and Yachad, with the latter saying that

[Chris Stephens]

“we are unequivocal about the need to protect the right to express differences of opinions, even if they are opinions that we fiercely disagree with”.

Let us listen to them. On the broader issue of human rights at home, let us listen to some other organisations. Amnesty International asserts that the Bill

“would make it almost impossible for public bodies to use their procurement and investment policies to incentivise ethical business conduct that is human rights compliant.”

But we knew that already. Amnesty goes on to say:

“Companies depending on public contracts will feel more confident that their global impacts on human rights and the environment will be irrelevant to their success in tendering processes.”

I see this Bill as a clear incitement to such companies to lessen their commitments to human rights and the environment, as they will no longer need them to gain public contracts. Companies that respect human rights face being undercut by those that knowingly breach international standards with little fear of consequences. What a horrible race to the bottom.

There is a niggling problem here for the Government regarding human rights. There is a global consensus on the human rights standards applicable to companies. The United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights were unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Standards Organisation. The UK was the first country to develop a national action plan to implement those guiding principles, and now we appear to be the first country to renege on those commitments.

The UK is in danger of being a rogue state in this field, going against the tide of international opinion, which considers that public bodies should use procurement and investment policies to incentivise business to be ethical and human rights compliant. I would argue that is in the public interest. Let us consider an example from Amnesty, whereby an NHS body might choose to avoid sourcing medical equipment from certain suppliers, such as Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan or Mexico, saying that they had been implicated in modern slavery. Those overseas supply companies could take legal action under this legislation on the grounds that the decision makers were influenced by

“political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct”,

and the courts would then have to determine whether the exemption in the Bill for labour-related misconduct applied in that particular case.

Let us imagine that a public body in Scotland decided to stop sourcing beef from a Brazilian meat distribution company whose products had been linked to deforestation of the Amazon. If the proposed law had been in place during the previous Brazil presidency, when exploitation of the Amazon was being actively encouraged, the Brazilian Government or the company whose products were being excluded could have challenged the decision in the High Court on the grounds that it was influenced by

“political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct”.

Since it is unclear whether the environmental misconduct exemption referred to in part 2 of the schedule to the Bill would prevail, the risk attached would have been

likely to deter any public body from taking such a decision on environmental grounds. They would have been compelled to be complicit in deforestation.

Liberty and other groups have pointed out that the Bill gives the enforcement authority the power to issue a notice to a public authority requesting an assessment of whether there has, or may be, a breach of the ban or the prohibition on making statements. The Bill gives the enforcement authority the power to impose a compliance notice where they consider a person is likely to contravene the ban—not “has contravened”, but “is likely to contravene”. We are in the realms of Orwell’s thought police or Philip K. Dick’s “The Minority Report”, with precogs catching criminals before they have even committed the crime. The normal police come for someone if they commit a criminal act, but the thought police are different; they act if someone intends to act in some particular way.

Under the Bill, the authorities do not need to demonstrate any proof of intent to publish a particular kind of statement. That is impossible to do in the normal world, so let us just rely on telepathy for finding out someone’s intent. Clause 4 of the Bill would prohibit public bodies and their leaders—such as university vice-chancellors, local council leaders, or even the chief executive of a private company delivering public services—from publishing public statements indicating that they intend to act in a way that would contravene the ban, or that they would, in theory, intend to act that way if not for the ban. A local council could no longer publish statements such as, “Our local council would have boycotted these goods from this state-owned enterprise due to the state’s conduct in relation to this territory, but the law does not permit this, and we intend to comply with the law.” I never expected to say these words, as someone who subscribes to socialist theory, but: we must remove clause 4. I say that just on this occasion. I notice that an amendment to that effect has been tabled.

Liberty has also pointed out that in other jurisdictions, anti-boycott laws have had a severe impact on freedom of expression. In one case in the US, a speech pathologist in Texas lost her school contract because she declined to sign an agreement promising not to boycott Israel on the basis of a similar anti-boycott law. In another, a dermatologist was withheld payment for a lecture for failing to agree not to boycott Israel. US campaigners have further warned that anti-boycott legislation, once enacted, is liable to be extended to a plethora of issues—from fossil fuels to gun control. I fear we are looking at another damaging cultural import from the United States of America.

3 pm

Following the earlier Scottish example, let us look more broadly at the consequences of the Bill for Scotland and the UK’s other devolved Governments. COP26 was held in Glasgow, and there has now been a watering down of the Government’s climate commitments, but Scotland remains committed to combatting climate change. In fact, the Governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are all attempting to use the leverage of public procurement to incentivise companies to behave sustainably with regard to human rights, fairness, labour rights and the environment. Those policies will clearly be undermined by the Bill, despite investment and procurement being devolved to all three Parliaments.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I have heard the Secretary of State say several times that the Conservatives are in favour of devolution, so should they not be required to seek consent from the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland before they proceed?

Chris Stephens: My hon. Friend is correct that they should. I suspect they will not receive it from either the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Senedd, for many reasons. As he says, there is clearly an impact on devolution.

Devolution was approved overwhelmingly by the people of Scotland, and any erosion of it is strongly opposed by most, but not all, parties in that Parliament. I will let Members guess which party is least protective of Scotland's interests. Scotland's current legislative powers are guarded jealously, and there is strong demand for many—possibly all—reserved powers to be transferred to Scottish control. That is not surprising.

I and others will continue to explore the Bill's deficiencies again today, pointing out its many contradictions.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his excellent speech. He has given very good democratic, social and moral reasons for why the Bill is in deep defect. Does he not think a better process would be for the Secretary of State now to withdraw the Bill altogether?

Chris Stephens: That would be very helpful indeed. The right hon. Gentleman is right. Those of us who have tabled amendments are trying to clean up a dog's breakfast, which is very difficult. We are all trying to make the Bill a little better but, as my good friend says, the ultimate solution would be to withdraw it entirely.

I have highlighted the Bill's contradictions, counter-productiveness and profound consequences, and I will be seeking to divide the House on amendment 28. I look forward to hearing other Members pursue their amendments.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I would like to speak against all the amendments and new clauses before us today and in support of the Bill as currently drafted.

We need this Bill. I thank the Government for including it in the Conservative manifesto and taking it forward, and I urge the whole House to back the Bill and reject the amendments. This, of all times, is a time to stand with the Jewish community, following the worst attack on Jewish people since the holocaust.

BDS has been identified in a succession of studies as driving a rise in antisemitism. By singling out the world's only Jewish state for criticism, above and beyond that directed at any other country in similar circumstances, I believe BDS campaigns fall within the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. The French supreme court has ruled that BDS is discriminatory, and the German Parliament views the movement as antisemitic.

Since the shocking Hamas terror attacks, we have witnessed deeply disturbing scenes on our TV screens and in our streets. These include sickening so-called celebrations of the horrific murders in southern Israel, and the anti-Jewish racism and hatred visible at successive protests on the streets of our capital city. At a time like

this, when Jewish people are in fear for their friends and relatives in Israel, it is appalling to compound their anxiety and distress with hate-filled banners and chants at such protests. I find it deeply depressing that “Jihad! Jihad!” has been shouted with impunity on the streets of our city, and that ISIS flags have been on blatant display.

The dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents is wholly unacceptable, and it shows us that we need campaigns to bring communities together, not drive them apart. There can be no doubt that BDS is absolutely focused on division, not unity. The BDS movement deplores co-existence and peacebuilding initiatives. For example, it has condemned co-operation between Israeli and Palestinian universities. The movement's founder, Omar Barghouti, has repeatedly expressed his opposition to Israel's right to exist.

As we go into the voting Lobbies this evening, we are in a situation where the question to be asked of all of us is: “Which side are you on?”. I make it clear that I strongly support the right of Israel to defend its land and its citizens from terrorist attack.

Of course, we all worry about the plight of innocent Gazans put in harm's way by Hamas, who brutalise them and deliberately use them as human shields. Of course, we need to get supplies to civilians, so long as there is confidence that they cannot be diverted or misused by terrorists. We must always remember that it is Hamas who have endangered the people of Gaza. Hamas are the people who have caused the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

I am in no doubt that the Israeli Defence Forces are making, and will continue to make, the greatest efforts possible to prevent civilian loss of life. Israel is one of the most democratic countries in the world, and it respects the rule of law. I am certain that its democratic and legal institutions will hold its armed forces rigorously to account. Those on the Labour Benches who line up to casually, and wrongly, accuse Israel of war crimes should check their facts, not rush to judgment.

We need our local authorities to concentrate on delivering services, not on conducting their own trade and foreign policy. We need campaigns that promote peaceful progress towards a two-state solution, not bitterness and exclusion. We need to take all possible action against the antisemitism that we have seen increase so shockingly in recent days. We need this Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Following the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), let me say this:

“When things are so delicate, we all have a responsibility to take additional care in the language we use, and to operate on the basis of facts alone.”—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 592.]

Those are the words of the Prime Minister in his statement to the House on Monday. He also said that “this is not a time for hyperbole and simplistic solutions.”

He was absolutely right about the importance of tone in today's debate, as we discuss the 7 October attack and events in the middle east. What we say and how we behave in this Chamber really matters, because it echoes

[Angela Rayner]

out across the country. It goes without saying that the disgusting rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia since the attack on 7 October only makes that point more profound.

I fear that the Prime Minister's powerful statement at the Dispatch Box earlier this week has been undermined by how he and his Ministers have brought this Bill before us today, at the last minute and with the least possible notice. The tension and disagreement surrounding the issues are well known to the Secretary of State yet, in the middle of a humanitarian emergency in the middle east, he has chosen this week of all weeks to force this legislation on to the parliamentary timetable—a Bill that fails the Prime Minister's own test of avoiding simplistic solutions.

There can be no doubt that Labour is opposed to a policy of adopting boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, as it wrongly singles out one individual nation and is counterproductive to the prospect of peace. We know this is a serious issue.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The right hon. Lady says with some force at the Dispatch Box that Labour is clearly opposed to singling out Israel through BDS measures, yet where Labour is in government in the UK—Wales—the Welsh Labour Government sought to bring forward a procurement note that singled out Israel and the Palestinian territories. Can she explain what her position was when her colleagues in Wales sought to do that?

Angela Rayner: I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention. We are hoping to get consensus around what we are trying to do. I stand by my statement, but we do not want one nation to be singled out in this boycott. We do not agree with boycott tactics, which is why we were concerned enough to table our amendment to the Procurement Bill back in February, when I shadowed the Cabinet Office, which would have prevented councils from singling out Israel or any other country. The Government have consistently opposed that amendment.

Today, we are presented with a Bill that will not address the problem it rightly seeks to solve. As it stands, the Bill has needlessly broad and sweeping draconian powers and far-reaching effects. It is poorly drafted legislation that risks creating fresh legal disputes, and will only serve as new flashpoints for community tension. We remain far from convinced that protracted legal battles over the BDS would serve or protect Jewish communities in the UK. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) clearly spelled out those issues on Second Reading, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) and for Caerphilly (Wayne David) in Committee. Today is the fourth time that we have presented the Government with a chance to change course and choose a more constructive way forward, yet the Bill has been brought back nearly totally unamended—the only change is to the explanatory notes. It is all too clear that the Secretary of State has not listened.

However, there is a way forward. In our view, it is not wrong for public bodies to take ethical investment and procurement decisions. There is a difference between applying consistent ethical principles in legitimate criticism

of foreign Governments and what, in recent years, some individuals and organisations have tried to do: seek to target Israel alone; hold it to different standards from other countries; question its right to exist; and equate the actions of the Israeli Government to Jewish people and in doing so, create hate and hostility against Jewish people here in the UK. That is completely wrong.

Amendment 13, on which we will seek a vote today, addresses that problem. It would allow public bodies to produce a document setting out their policy on procurement and human rights. The policy would be cemented in a framework, based on principles that apply equally to all countries, rather than singling out individual nations. Such a statement of ethical policy would ensure consistency in how public bodies decide on these matters, and would be subject to guidance issued by elected Ministers and laid before this House. Any inconsistent application would be prohibited. Under Labour's proposals, if a public body were to act only against a particular state—for instance, the world's only Jewish state—and failed to comply a consistent approach to human rights everywhere, such actions would be unlawful. We were disappointed that the Government chose not to support our amendment at previous stages, but I repeat today our offer to the Government—indeed, the whole House—to work together and speak with one voice on this most serious of issues, by accepting the amendment.

Moving on, there are four more concerning areas in the Bill that I wish to raise briefly with the Secretary of State. First, we have serious reservations about how the Bill effectively rewrites UK foreign policy by explicitly equating Israel with the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. That is an unprecedented step that, to my knowledge, has never been taken in British statute and is unique in British legislation.

3.15 pm

An essential cornerstone of British policy, supported across this House—and at the UN—is support for a two-state solution as a viable long-term solution to give Israelis and Palestinians the recognition and security that they deserve. The wording of the Bill not only calls into question the UK's long-standing position in supporting a two-state solution but runs counter to the UN resolutions. Such a move would also go against the very aim of the Bill by singling out Israel in such an exceptional manner, failing to treat it like any other country or nation.

Secondly, and related, the Secretary of State claims that the Bill is non-country-specific and of general application, but the only states and territories named in the Bill are Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. Quite apart from singling out Israel, the Bill applies as much to China, Myanmar and North Korea as it does to Israel. For example, it could have significant effects on the ability of communities to support the Uyghur minorities in China, who are victims of grave human rights abuses.

Andrew Western (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend knows, I am a former local authority leader in Trafford. I am incredibly proud that, when I was the leader of Trafford Council, my Labour administration took steps to cease procurement linked to the Xinjiang region because of the oppression and suppression of Uyghur Muslims. Am I correct to interpret the Bill as seeming to suggest that my Labour administration

and I were incorrect to do that, and that others up and down the country who speak up for human rights and against that sort behaviour are in the wrong?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, which is why we are trying to gain consensus across the House through our amendments. It is important that people should be able to raise concerns appropriately and in the best way. The Bill does not allow that. Even the Foreign Secretary's office warned No. 10 about the impact of the Bill on our foreign commitments. For that reason, we welcome amendment 7 in the name of the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), which has support across the House—including from Members from the Liberal Democrat and SNP Benches. We think it will go some way to addressing the problem.

Thirdly, I want to re-emphasise the concerns raised by Members from all major parties about clause 4—the so-called gagging clause. I acknowledge the changes made to the explanatory notes in this area, but this unprecedented restriction could have far-reaching consequences for our democracy, and I urge the Secretary of State to think again. I have tabled amendment 16, which would address the issue of elected bodies. It is a mark of the concern across the House that there are so many amendments to the clause, including from Members from the Government and the SNP Benches. The seriousness of the clause must not be underestimated. It is an unprecedented restriction on the ability of the public bodies—many of them directly elected—to express a view on policy, effectively gagging them from even talking about it.

We are concerned that clause 4 would be incompatible with article 10 of the European convention on human rights, which protects freedom of expression. Labour's amendment 14 seeks to remove the most sweeping provisions in the Bill through which the Secretary of State intends to hand himself unprecedented power to change the scope and application of the Bill through regulations.

Lastly, it is important to note that the Bill in its current form will not set out what it seeks to achieve. There are loopholes that will allow discriminatory acts to continue unchallenged. Our new clause 3 presents just one example, and I am sure that there are many more. The new clause requires the Government to review the impact of the Bill on discrimination, and addresses one form of it that has been raised with me—refusal to provide kosher food. We on the Labour Benches know that that impacts on many British Jews across this country, causing much distress and suffering. That is the type of concerning practice that should be tackled, but the Bill in its current form will not address it. I urge the Secretary of State to take a pause, take a step back, and consider that there might be another way through.

I assure the Secretary of State that Labour feels strongly that BDS practices against Israel offer no meaningful route to peace for the people of either Palestine or of Israel. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan said on Second Reading,

“We on the Labour Benches do not claim that all those who support BDS, despite our profound disagreement with them on that issue, are antisemitic.”—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2023; Vol. 735, c. 527.]

But let us be clear: the effect of BDS would be the total economic, social and cultural isolation of the world's only Jewish state, and there are those who use the campaign to whip up hostility towards Jewish people, providing no route to peace and a two-state solution. I can assure the Secretary of State that Labour will continue to condemn and oppose that in the strongest terms. I do not believe there is genuine disagreement between us on that point.

But let me be totally clear, too, both as a shadow Minister and as deputy leader of the Labour party: now more than ever we expect councils to bring all their communities together and represent all their citizens. It would be utterly wrong to choose one community over another—or worse, pit one against another.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I agree 100% with the right hon. Lady that we must be moderate in our tone and the language we use. Does she agree it was therefore very unhelpful for the Scottish Labour leader to use terms accusing Israel of breaching international law when we are discussing such a sensitive subject?

Angela Rayner: As I said at the start of the debate, people have to be responsible—and, in fairness, I acknowledged that the Prime Minister at the start of this week also outlined that people have to be responsible. I say that across the whole House and genuinely mean it: we all have to be responsible. I know people feel very strongly at the moment about these issues, and rightly so, and I hope the hon. Gentleman sees from my contribution to this debate that I am taking that very seriously as well.

We rightly expect that our local government must surely stay by the principles I mentioned, but we must also make sure that our national Government do too. That is real leadership—of our communities, and of our whole country. Instead, I fear we have a Government unwilling to recognise what is needed from them at this moment on this Bill: careful, precise deliberation and to bring communities and the country with us.

I am disappointed that the Secretary of State has taken the reckless path of forcing the Bill back to Parliament today—a Bill that fails on its own terms. His approach risks dividing our country, our communities and even his party. I urge him now not to divide the House and to accept the amendments proposed by Members on the Opposition side and his own.

For our part, Labour stands ready—as we have at every single stage of the Bill—to work constructively with the Government and other parties to build consensus behind a workable, sensible solution. There is no doubt that the people of our country want us to speak with one voice. Labour stands ready and willing to work in good faith to achieve that goal. The question is, are the Government?

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): The Prime Minister was absolutely right earlier this week to say that the tone we adopt is incredibly important given the gravity of the events we are seeing in the middle east at the moment. Every single Member of this House is obviously absolutely horrified by the tragedy that is unfolding and the barbaric atrocities committed by Hamas. In my case, I absolutely support the right of

[George Eustice]

Israel to self-defence, but it is possible to believe all these things—to be a friend of Israel, too—but nevertheless to be reluctant to pass bad legislation through this House unamended when we have the opportunity to make amendments on Report. It is possible, too, to believe strongly that freedom of contract and freedom of speech are important pillars in our liberal democracy, and that although we might sometimes fetter those key pillars of freedom and our liberal democracy, we should not do so lightly.

For that reason, I would support amendments 7 and 3 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), because putting the occupied territories and Israel into the Bill is unusual for a Bill of this sort. We must ask this question: if the purpose is to make it difficult for a future Government to take a position that would change the approach to our close allies, why is the United States not also listed? Many of the groups that people object to, such as BDS, are often quite anti-American as well, so why do we not have a fuller list of countries to make it difficult for them to add?

More importantly, this sends an unfortunate signal around British foreign policy. It has been the long-standing position of all British Governments that we support a two-state solution and that the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal. That is a consistent British Government position over a long period of time, and we must be careful not to send signals that that has changed.

More importantly, I would also support amendment 3, because clause 4 is a strong violation of freedom of speech. It has come to something when we are saying that not only would people not be free to follow the procurement policy they want, but they would not even be allowed to say that the reason why they were not free to do so was this Bill. I will support amendments 7 or 3 if either go to a vote this evening.

However, I want to focus principally on the two amendments in my name—amendments 10 and 11. Although much of the debate around the Bill is understandably conducted through the context of BDS and of Israel and the Palestinian situation, the scope of clause 1 is very broad. What is before us this evening is a broad procurement Bill that places quite broad restrictions on procurements and applies to every country in the world. I presume the reason is that the Government's legal advice was that to have something that focused just on one country, Israel, or on just one campaign group, BDS, would create some legal issues. So they then had to construct a Bill that affects every organisation, every issue and every country, and then through the schedule try to piece back some of the liberties affected by the imposition of clause 1.

I want to focus on that schedule, because it lists lots of different issues that are outside the scope of clause 1, and rightly so, including “environmental misconduct”, but there is no mention of animal welfare. There will be times when public bodies will take a procurement decision based on animal welfare. They need to be free to do that, and it is not at all clear from the schedule that that could be done. Paragraph 10 mentions “environmental misconduct” and at the end talks about

“the life and health of plants and animals”,

but it does so very much in the context of the environment and the wild environment rather than through the context of kept animals.

The Government buying standards were recently revised to encourage all public bodies and all Government Departments to take account of animal welfare in their procurement policies, but the Bill would appear to curtail the right of local authorities to do just that. Legitimate issues will come into play here. These are probing amendments on which I am looking for reassurance from the Minister and an undertaking to consider these matters further in the other place. For instance, were a local authority to judge that it would prefer to procure lamb from New Zealand over, say, Australia, because New Zealand has high animal welfare standards while the Australian sheep industry has poor levels of animal welfare and does not have in place the right regulatory powers to deal with certain practices, that would be a legitimate consideration. Indeed, it is not only legitimate but a consideration that the Government's own buying standards and the Crown Commercial Service encourage all public bodies to pursue.

In closing, my question, which is very much linked to my two amendments, is this: is the Minister's understanding that it would be entirely in order under the Bill for any local authority or public body to make decisions based on animal welfare, and that any such decision related to animal welfare would be totally outside the scope of clause 1?

3.30 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): This was a dreadful piece of legislation when we debated it on Second Reading, and it returns to us on Report in an equally dreadful state. In July, on Second Reading, I said that the Bill was being introduced at the wrong time, given the violence and unrest taking place in the region. Never in my worst nightmares did I think that we would experience the brutal, inhumane and indiscriminate massacre that was unleashed on innocent Israeli civilians on 7 October, and the subsequent humanitarian catastrophe that we are now witnessing in Gaza. To bring this wrong-headed, poorly drafted and politically motivated Bill back to the House in the midst of these horrors—horrors that we are seeing every hour of the day and every hour of the night, on our television screens and on social media—is an act of complete irresponsibility and unbelievable foolishness.

I speak as a proud Jew; I speak as a strong supporter of Israel, a committed Zionist; and I speak as someone who opposes the BDS movement and believes that its intent is to try to destroy the state of Israel. But I do not speak on my own; I know that I speak in the name of thousands of Jews in Britain, who are not always represented in this House—particularly by some Jewish Members in the House—and for millions of Jews in Israel. I simply ask the Minister—and the Secretary of State, who is now in his place—to please withdraw this nasty Bill and come back in the autumn with a properly considered proposal that can be accepted by us all.

This is an emotional time to us all—it is for me—but I urge Ministers: we should all be working together at this time. Every MP in this House should be working to calm things down in the middle east, to contain conflict,

to secure the release of hostages and to stop the humanitarian catastrophe we are seeing in Gaza. We should not be seeking to divide Members now.

I put it to Ministers that the Bill contains proposals that will only heighten tensions between communities. Work by the Community Security Trust shows us that there has been a 651% increase in antisemitic attacks from 7 to 20 October. My own family and my own grandchildren have been subject to such attacks, and I know what difficulty this brings to many, many families in this country. The Bill will only deepen the hostilities. It will not help our communities; it will only strengthen the polarisation that is already so evident. We see it in our schools, in our universities and in our workplaces.

The Bill will not help Israel as it seeks to defend itself against an existential threat. It will simply become just one more thing to enrage those people who oppose the state of Israel. It will not help Jews at all as we struggle to come to terms with the pogrom that took place in the kibbutzim and the music festival some two weeks ago. It will not help us as we all struggle to find a route to peace that allows Israel to defend itself without inflicting intolerable hardship on Palestinians, who have also become the victims of Hamas's terrorist activity. I plead with the Government to withdraw this legislation and to help us to work together.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate the remarks that the right hon. Lady is making—she speaks with some authority because of her background—but I fail to see the logic of her point that a Bill that prevents local authorities deliberately highlighting their opposition to the existence of the state of Israel, and boycotting goods from it, is likely to lead to bad community relations. Surely stopping local authorities acting in such a partisan way will help to establish better community relations.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I beg to differ with what the right hon. Gentleman says, because the Bill in itself is so contentious that it will not actually stop activity, but encourage those who want to argue against the state of Israel and want to argue against what is currently happening in the Israeli-Palestinian war. It will give them added strength, so I simply disagree with him. At a time like this, the worst thing we can do is introduce contentious legislation.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I respect the right hon. Lady for her views, but just on that last point, the idea that we should not do something because the people who hate Israel will be even angrier about it does not seem to me to be a very credible argument. These people were out in front of the embassy in the immediate aftermath of the attacks demanding boycotts of Israel, before Israel even had time to respond. Is it really a credible argument that we should not do this because it might make the people who hate Israel even angrier?

Dame Margaret Hodge: I hope that as I develop my argument the hon. Member will listen, because it is the flaws in the Bill that I think actually damage its intention, which is to limit and deal with the evils of the BDS movement. I said a little earlier that I oppose the BDS movement. I recognise that the BDS movement probably has the intention of trying to destroy the state of Israel. I want to tackle that, but I think that doing so in the

way that is proposed in this legislation will simply damage that intent, not meet it. I think maybe that is where he and I differ.

The Bill is flawed in so many ways. The main reason is that it is not designed to tackle a problem; it is designed to score a crude party political point, as I said on Second Reading. I am afraid that the Secretary of State himself gave the game away on that occasion, when he said:

“The question for every Member of this House is whether they stand with us against antisemitism or not.”—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2023; Vol. 735, c. 591.]

I respectfully say to him that that is not the question, but it does lay bare the truth about the Bill. The Government believe that they have set a trap for the Opposition: if we speak against the Bill, they will try to paint us as antisemites. But I say to the Government that if they pass the Bill in its current form, it is they who will be encouraging antisemitism by fuelling hatred. They will be encouraging antisemitism by specifying on the face of the Bill only one country where the boycott of goods would be illegal, simply confirming in people's minds that Israel and the Israel-Palestine conflict is a special case, different from all the other cases around. That is a constant problem, a constant issue that is raised with me by people who are worried and concerned—over time, not particularly in relation to the war as it stands—about attitudes in the UK to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Everybody says, “Why pick on Israel?”

So why do the Government now select Israel? It is they who are encouraging antisemitism by gagging free speech in our universities and council chambers. It is they who are encouraging antisemitism by trampling on the democratic rights of local politicians. It is an incredible arrogance for us as MPs to sit here and think that somehow we are better than, or different from, locally elected councillors who also have political views and who also carry out important democratic jobs in their councils.

It is the Government who are encouraging antisemitism by ignoring our obligations under the UN Security Council. It is they who are encouraging antisemitism—and I say this on the basis of my experience of fighting the British National party in Barking from 2006 until the general election in 2010—by refusing to engage in an open debate. By closing the debate, they give added credibility to the idea that those who seek to destroy the state of Israel are somehow wronged.

Stephen Crabb: As the right hon. Lady knows, I have a huge amount of respect for her, and she speaks on these issues with an authority with which many of us cannot speak about them. She knows better than anyone that a tide of vile antisemitism has been unleashed in the country. Last week, some of us heard from Jewish students who were afraid to give their surnames because they were afraid of giving away their Jewish identity—afraid to admit that they were Jewish. One said that they felt as if Jews were being pushed out of British universities. If July was not a good time to introduce legislation to draw a line in the sand, and if now is an even worse time, when is a good time to make a stand on behalf of Jewish people who are at risk at this time?

Dame Margaret Hodge: Let me start by saying that the growth of antisemitism on the streets and in our communities is absolutely terrible. It is affecting some

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

of the youngest people in my own family, and it is dreadful to observe the impact that it has on young children. So I am completely with the right hon. Gentleman on that. My point is that the legislation is so flawed that it does not meet its intent. I would love to work with Ministers, and with Members across the House, to produce a piece of legislation that would tackle the issue that we know exists in relation to BDS, but would do so in a way that was not contentious. It does not have to be like this; we could do it in another way, and doing that as soon possible would be a really good thing to do.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Surely this is the point that my right hon. Friend is making. Surely the answer to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) is that a good time would be a time when those of good will had had a sufficient opportunity to engage in the necessary discussions to find a consensus that would lead to an acceptable and sensible piece of legislation.

Dame Margaret Hodge: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point, and I am grateful to him for his intervention.

I do feel really emotional about today. It is, I think, an emotional day for many of us in the Chamber. Let me just say this to the Secretary of State. He is trying to put forward legislation in the name of the Jewish community, but he is not doing so in my name, or in the name of literally thousands of people I talk to here in the UK who are all good Jews, proud of their Jewish identity. I also know from my conversations with family, friends and colleagues in Israel that there are many there who also think that this is a poor piece of legislation. I plead with the Secretary of State please, please to withdraw the Bill, which I think would be more damaging than helpful, and to engage in the sort of debate that has been suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), which could bring us to a mutually agreed conclusion, reaching the objective that we all want.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. May I provide a little guidance? If Members speak for a maximum of about eight minutes, we will be able to get everyone in.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): I support this excellent Bill and wish to speak against all the amendments. I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for taking the Bill through the House. I support it for three principal reasons: first, it is genuinely needed; secondly, boycotts are inherently discriminatory and contrary to public policy, especially when engaged in by third-tier local authorities; and thirdly, the BDS movement internationally is inextricably linked to antisemitism. I will explore those three points briefly.

Perhaps I can give the House just two examples of why the Bill is needed. The first is the example of the now bankrupt Birmingham City Council, which threatened in 2014 not to renew a contract with the French multinational company Veolia due to its operations in the west bank. In 2015, Veolia withdrew from the Israeli market as a consequence and the BDS movement claimed

that decision as a victory. Of course, that hurt Palestinians as well as everyone else. Another example, shamefully, is that of the supermarket Sainsbury's. In at least one of its branches, it was put under so much pressure that it removed kosher food products from its shelves following virulent anti-Israel protests. So this is about protecting communities and avoiding antisemitism succeeding. The Bill will prevent divisive behaviour that undermines community cohesion across the country. I am afraid to say that BDS activity has legitimised and driven antisemitism in the United Kingdom, as it exclusively targets Israel.

3.45 pm

My second point is that it is inherently discriminatory to engage in boycotts of this type. I am not alone in saying that. I pray in aid on this point none other than the Supreme Court of France, which ruled as long ago as 2009 that calls for a boycott of Israeli products in France constituted discrimination and were, as such, illegal under French law. I also refer Members to the German Parliament, which designated the BDS movement as antisemitic in May 2019. And again I cite the harm to Palestinians, with the infamous example of the soft drinks company Sodastream, which, under intense pressure, had to shut down its operations causing the loss of 500 Palestinian jobs. The company simply moved a few miles into Israel and other people got those jobs. This is harmful to all sides of the community.

It is worth rehearsing that it was stated in evidence to one of the Bill Committees of this House some time ago that the BDS national committee, an international centre point for the movement, includes members of the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, which is a coalition of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Those are all terrorist organisations that are proscribed by His Majesty's Government. The general co-ordinator of the BDS national committee is Mahmoud Nawajaa, who has publicly supported Hamas's armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, and the leader of the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, Khaled al-Batsh, is a senior official of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a proscribed terrorist organisation funded and co-ordinated by Iran.

So it is for those reasons—BDS's international links to antisemitism and its discriminatory province, and how obviously the Bill is needed in this country, as well as its principle—that it must be for central Government to make decisions on foreign policy, and not for borough and city councils that, with the greatest possible respect, cannot possibly appreciate all the nuances involved in these international decisions.

Sir Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con): I 100% endorse and agree with everything that my right hon. and learned Friend has been outlining, and the argument he is making is very powerful. Does he agree that, right now, there is obviously a hugely important moral and ethical purpose to being clear about our opposition to antisemitism in any form, at any time and from any organisation, let alone the abhorrence of what BDS stands for, in the light of the terrorist atrocity that we have seen? This Bill predates the atrocity that we saw earlier this month and, returning to his core point, its original purpose is the correct one, which is to remind us that central Government's role is to deal with foreign

policy and to ensure that local councils are making decisions that are based not on their foreign policy or any other ideological pressure or views but on the best value for local residents.

Sir Michael Ellis: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend, who makes his point eloquently.

Israel clearly has a vibrant economy and welcomes everyone. I challenge those both outside this House and in other countries who support the BDS movement to bear in mind that I suspect that they would not be able to function in today's modern society if they were to personally boycott companies that are already deeply engaged in Israel and do business there. I will give some examples: Apple, Google, Intel, Microsoft, 3M, Alibaba, Amazon, Fujitsu, AOL, Siemens, Bosch, Sony, Texas Instruments, Samsung, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Western Digital, Xerox, Mitsubishi, Pfizer, Salesforce, Visa, Mastercard, Honda, Ford. I have lists of dozens of companies that do business in the state of Israel. Let us bear in mind that those persons who seek to boycott Israel do so with an air of double standards. That is the very least that can be said about it. I support this Bill and reject all of the proposed amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Jeremy Corbyn.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I have not put in to speak.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call John McDonnell.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge)? If we descend into accusations that those who do not support the Bill are antisemites, or that those who support it are Islamophobic, I think we are lost, to be honest. It is important that we are careful about our language.

There is a profound misunderstanding about what we are debating. If this is about the BDS movement itself, there are mechanisms that the Government can use to proscribe an organisation. But the debate on this Bill should be about BDS as a method, a tactic. I have supported boycotting, disinvesting and sanctioning a whole range of regimes. I campaigned with and supported the anti-apartheid movement of BDS with regard to South Africa. Actually, a large number of Members on both sides of the House supported that. I also did so with regard to Saudi Arabia and its execution—tragically, it is still doing this—of members of the gay community. I have campaigned with others across the House with regard to Sri Lanka and the persecution of the Tamils, including the murder of a number of my constituents when they visited their families. I am doing the same at the moment with regard to Bahrain because of its imprisonment of the political opposition. It is the same with Russia. I was a founder member 10 years ago of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign and we have been calling for sanctions against Russia for years—in advance of even the Government, to be honest. It is the same with Iran. I chair the Iranian workers' movement committee, which supports trade unionists campaigning in Iran, many of whom are unfortunately in prison. There is also the Uyghurs.

On all of those, I have urged the use of BDS because when other representations and diplomacy fail, there are not many options left. One of the options, unfortunately, is the use of arms. In not promoting that, we have tried to find a middle lane, and that is economic isolation to try to influence. To be frank, it did work in South Africa. That is why we have tried to ensure that it is a mechanism that can be drawn upon. I agree, however, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) on the Front Bench. The important thing is to ensure that if we use this mechanism, it is used properly and fairly and that we do not discriminate against one particular country. That is what I have not done. I have called for BDS with regard to goods coming from the occupied territories and Iran because they are against the international order.

Having sat in this House for 25 years and listened to speeches from Conservative representatives, I have learned a bit about conservatism, so what I find extraordinary is that this Bill is profoundly unconservative. Those on the Government Front Bench seem to be rejecting many of the individual amendments in front of us. I have listened to Government Members arguing that the Conservative party stands for freedom of speech, support for the law, the rights of property, the democratic rights of this Parliament, local government and other agencies, devolution of decision-making, and support for the action on the environment and human rights.

Let me turn to the amendments on freedom of speech. Amendments 28 and 3 prevent the Government introducing a gagging order on even just talking about this—having a debate about it. That is profoundly unconservative. I cannot believe that Government Members are not supporting those amendments. On the issue of rights of property, I say to the Conservative Member whose constituency I cannot remember that we are both members of the local government pension fund. The Government are overriding the rights to my property, which is my pension fund. I cannot believe that the Conservatives are doing that. That is my stored wages for over 20 years of service in local government over which I now lose control, and the amendment simply says that the members of that pension fund will be allowed to decide.

Jeremy Corbyn: My right hon. Friend will recall the days when we managed to persuade the GLC pension fund not to invest in apartheid South Africa, but, as I am sure he will agree, the fundamentals of the Bill are that it actually reduces a very large area of freedom of speech for elected local councillors. That, to me, undermines the whole principle of representative democracy within our society.

John McDonnell: I agree. I was chair of finance at that time. It was interesting because there was an awful lot of cross-party support on that, as we were then at the stage of the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, and the worst oppressions that were going on, including what happened in Soweto.

Let me go through the amendments themselves. On devolution and local decision-making, all that amendments 5, 16, 34 and new clause 2 do is ensure that local democracy takes place. The arguments that I have heard from those on the Conservative Benches on several occasions is that local councillors should have the right to represent their local communities and, above all else, they should listen to their local communities. When there have been rows on the Government Benches, it is

[John McDonnell]

often as a result of councils not having listened to their local communities, and sometimes I have agreed. These amendments simply enable the local community to express their views and for that to be taken into account.

On environmental concerns, amendments 8, 10, 15 and 11 are simply reinforcing many of the policies that the Conservative party has been advocating in our attempts to get to net zero and protect animals at the same time. I have often heard Government Members saying that upholding the law is an essential part of conservatism. Well, that is what amendments 6 and 17 do. They are simply saying that the use of this mechanism can be helpful in upholding international law.

This Bill is a bad Bill. I agree that there might be the potential to gain consensus on it. One way forward is through the amendment that the Labour Front Bench has tabled to try to look at human rights in general to see how statements defining human rights can be made by Government, and that then influencing what happens in other decision-making areas, such as in local government, pension funds and so on. I believe that there is an opportunity for that, but what I come back to is that this is not the time to do something that in any way divides our communities. If the Bill is in any way amendable, let us just pull it. The Government have done that before. There has been a pause on legislation, allowing wiser heads to come together and to come back with something that actually might work.

If there are arguments about the BDS movement, and I totally condemn some of the statements that I have heard from some of the leaders associated with it, that is a separate issue. This is about a method of trying to influence individual countries to behave in line with international law, protect the environment, and so on. It is about trying to set standards in other countries that we want to promote globally anyway.

4 pm

This legislation is not something that I would expect from a Conservative party at any stage in its life, and certainly not now. If the Government pursue it, it leads us to the conclusion that my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking reached: that it is being done for grubby political purposes. If that is the case, we are in the gutter of politics rather than at the high level of politics that we should be debating in this country.

Andrew Percy: The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) put forward a clever argument, but many of us see through it to the real motivation. He himself said that he supports part of the BDS campaign.

The issue of timing is interesting. I am not sure whether we are being asked to wait until Hamas give us permission to bring the Bill back. Should we wait for their decision to end the violence, so that we are then able to bring this forward? People advanced the same arguments that they are advancing today before the massacre, so there will never be a good time to bring the legislation forward if we follow that line.

The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and I have disagreed on some things, but I respect her very much. She has been very brave in lots of the

things that she has done in recent years, but I think that it was beneath her to accuse people who support the legislation of driving antisemitism. That was an unfortunate slip, because it is a fact that the Jewish Leadership Council and the Board of Deputies support the legislation. She may be right that others in the Jewish community do not, but it is a fact that leadership groups within the community support the legislation.

Why now? For me, it was going down to see one of the marches two weeks ago. I do not want to call them marches for peace, because they were not; they were marches filled with hate. There were people there enjoying what happened in Israel. I saw many of them holding deeply antisemitic signs, many of which called for a boycott of the Israeli state. That said to me that this is a moment when we have to grasp this issue, which has been a poisonous part of political discourse on the middle east for so long. If not now, then when? There will never be a perfect time.

As I said in my intervention, even before the Israeli Government had acted in any way in Gaza in self-defence, BDS campaigners were outside the Israeli embassy, after 1,400 Israelis had been murdered—the worst murder of Jews since the holocaust. What were those campaigners doing? They were not there expressing sympathy for what had just happened; they were demanding that people boycott the state of Israel. This is a pernicious, nasty, antisemitic campaign, and there is no pretending otherwise, as indeed some people who oppose the Bill will agree.

The metrics are clear: BDS activities drive antisemitism. That is a fact, and we are all in agreement on that. On the pretence that there are lots of other countries at which this is aimed, let us be honest: only Israel is the focus of BDS activities. That is where the action in local government and the Welsh Government has been. It has all been about Israel. Let us be honest: for some of the people arguing against the legislation, it will always be about Israel. Whatever has happened, they are always here with words against Israel, holding Israel to different standards. It is the same people; they just find a different argument. It is the same on every issue related to the middle east. They are always here, some of them in this House, and it is always about the behaviour of the state of Israel.

I find it a really bizarre claim that because some people might react unpleasantly, or potentially violently, to us banning a campaign that all of us who have spoken so far—well, maybe not all of us—agree is antisemitic, that might inflame community tensions. What we are saying there, in effect, is that the elected House of Commons of the United Kingdom should not act because some people might not like it and might get violent. A country that follows that line of argument is a country that is lost. We agree that this is antisemitic and it should not matter, therefore, whether some people who might not like our approach might react. They have been reacting fairly unpleasantly already—we have all seen the marches—so I just do not buy that argument.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I have a huge amount of affection for my hon. Friend and understanding of what he is saying. I ask him to give me his view on the following, which relates to my concern. I take everything that he is saying, but at a time when our country can play a pivotal role in trying to de-escalate and find a

peaceful solution to the horror unravelling in the middle east, what assessment has he made of the damage that could arise from a claim of partiality being levelled against the Government for bringing this Bill forward at this time?

Andrew Percy: My hon. Friend said he had affection for me. Not many people say that, so I welcome it and I will be framing that part of *Hansard*. However, I will just push back on the point he makes. How is impartiality impacted by outlawing something that all of us agree is antisemitic? Who sits on the Palestinian BDS National Committee? It is Hamas and Islamic Jihad. So are we saying that we should not ban this antisemitic campaign because some people might not like that. We can push that argument quickly back in the other direction.

I went over my time on the last occasion, so I am going to stay absolutely within my time now, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will end with a powerful quote in *The Jewish Chronicle* today from its former editor Stephen Pollard. He said:

“You might think that now of all times, when the world has witnessed the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, there would be a clamour, a rush, even a demand for the BDS Bill to be passed. Now of all times, surely, is the time to stand up and say we see where Jew hate leads.”

That is the best argument for this legislation and for why now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for keeping within time, but I am now going to impose a time limit of eight minutes, just to ensure that everybody gets the chance to speak.

Caroline Lucas: The speech we have just listened to from the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) shows exactly why this is not the right time for this Bill and this debate. The speech from the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) that he criticised was a perfectly reasonable one making the case for the tools of boycott, sanctions and divestment. To suggest that those tools are intrinsically antisemitic is clearly and evidentially wrong. The vast generalisations that the hon. Gentleman has deployed again show why this Bill is deeply unhelpful and the timing downright dangerous.

The brutal attacks on Israeli civilians by Hamas on 7 October have filled every right-thinking person with horror and underscored the urgent need to stand against violence. We do that, in part, by defending and advocating human rights. These principles need to guide our response to the collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza, too, and to any other unlawful action being perpetrated by the Israeli or Palestinian authorities, or by Hamas.

I am struggling to understand why, as one of the leading global champions of human rights, the UK would want to send a signal that it thinks that human rights matter only selectively—that would be the impact of the current wording if the Bill passes. It would say to the world that some people’s rights matter less than other people’s. Frankly, the timing seems designed to make political capital from a horrendous situation, and the Government should be ashamed. This is a new low,

and it is reckless, provocative and deeply damaging. The Government risk igniting the situation further by bringing back this Bill with the clause singling out Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This legislation, in effect, applies restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and debate, in a way that risks polarising views even further. At any time, let alone in this most sensitive of contexts, enshrining in law such partiality towards the conflict is beyond irresponsible.

I have tabled three amendments to the Bill: two on the ability of public bodies to make decisions about their activities on environmental grounds and one to exclude fossil fuels from the Bill’s provisions. First, on fossil fuels, there is a worrying lack of clarity from the Government about what it may or may not be permissible for public bodies to do should the Bill be enacted. My amendment 15 is intended to clear that up and protect the right of public authorities to divest from fossil fuels.

Earlier this week, Friends of the Earth published evidence that at least £12.2 billion of local government pension funds is invested in fossil fuels. The clarity that I seek to provide with my amendment is needed because fossil fuels are obviously not covered by the environmental misconduct exemption in respect of illegal activities, because obviously extraction currently happens legally. It is needed because decisions to divest could easily be brought into the scope of clause 1 because a fossil fuel company, especially in the case of state oil and gas firms, could easily meet the threshold for association with a foreign Government. Majority state-owned or controlled oil or gas firms such as Saudi Aramco, Equinor, Petrobras and Gazprom, or other companies that are highly associated with a foreign Government, would obviously be considered to be affiliated with certain countries, which would affect decisions about things like pension funds.

The ability of pension schemes in particular to divest from fossil fuels under current legislation and guidance is well established and compatible with fiduciary duty. The consideration of whether to divest often includes the discussion or consideration of individual states as examples of why divestment is desirable. Campaigners will often publicly cite examples of states where fossil fuel extraction is taking place as a reason to divest from fossil fuel assets, even if the divestment sought is much broader. This is reasonable and entirely responsible given the financial risks associated with things such as carbon bubbles and stranded assets, let alone the climate crisis more broadly, and it is currently lawful. But if the legislation is passed, such consideration runs the risk of being judged to have been influenced by the political or moral disapproval of foreign state conduct and thus bring divestment decisions within the Bill’s scope. If the Minister does not intend fossil fuel divestment to be covered by the Bill, it must be explicitly excluded, not left to run the kind of risks that I have outlined.

On environmental misconduct, some sorely lacking clarity needs to be injected into the Bill, hence my two amendments. The Bill has an exemption that is limited to environmentally harmful behaviour that

“amounts to an offence, whether under the law of a part of the United Kingdom or any other country or territory”.

Much environmentally destructive activity takes place entirely legally; indeed, that could even be the rationale for a boycott or a divestment campaign. During the passage of the Environment Act 2021, the limitations of

[Caroline Lucas]

due diligence measures that targeted only illegal deforestation were made clear—for example, because a significant proportion of deforestation due to soy or palm oil in Brazil or Indonesia respectively could take place legally, or because it would be incredibly difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal deforestation.

My amendment 8 would expand the environmental grounds on which a public body is allowed to make certain economic decisions beyond activities that are currently simply an offence. Without it, the exemption is unworkable at worst and will undermine good practice at best. Let me explain. Several pension experts who gave evidence in Committee warned that the Bill will impact on environmental, social and governance investment decisions and cut across pension schemes' fiduciary duty. Those experts included the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee and the Local Government Association. It is now standard practice to consider ESG factors when looking at investments, and there is widespread concern that the environmental misconduct exemption is so weak that it does not provide the exemptions that Ministers claim it provides. In turn, this is a threat to adherence with things such as the United Nations principles for responsible investment or, indeed, the sustainable development goals. It fails to recognise that investors often consider divergence from best practice, and not simply breaches of law, and it fails to reflect the fact that in countries with, for example, opaque legal systems, the establishment of whether an offence has occurred may not be straightforward.

There is also a risk that a campaign directed at persuading public bodies to boycott or divest on environmental grounds could end up coming within the scope of the legislation. That could happen if, for example, case studies are judged to constitute the criticism or disapproval of a foreign state, or if they identify where an environmentally harmful activity such as logging in the Amazon is taking place. The Government are fond of claiming that they have the very best environmental credentials, so why would they want to scupper the potential for public bodies to demand higher environmental standards—for example, in their supply chains or from their pension fund managers—with a poorly worded reference to “environmental misconduct”?

My amendment 8 would tackle that and provide for a proper exemption. My amendment 9 would extend the definition of “environmental misconduct” to include damage, regardless of whether it was legal or illegal, as well as species, habitats and the natural world. It replicates word for word the definition of “natural environment” in the Government's own Environment Act 2021; as such, I hope that it provides the consistency and clarity that are not currently afforded by the current wording. I would be especially interested to know why Ministers did not use that wording in the first place, given that it is already in the 2021 Act, and why they are not aiming for a consistent definition of “natural environment” across different legislation.

To conclude, my amendments are designed to properly protect the exemptions that Ministers claim are in the Bill, in line with definitions in other legislation.

4.15 pm

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): I rise to speak in favour of the motion and to support the Bill.

The events on 7 October mean that we are debating the Bill in a different context. We are doing so against the backdrop of the murder of at least 1,400 Jewish people and the kidnapping of hundreds in Israel, as well as a 641% rise in antisemitic incidents in the UK. The Bill is not on its own a solution to antisemitism or the key to solving every problem in the middle east. However, I will explain why it will not only provide much-needed reassurance to the Jewish community here, but benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. I will set out why the BDS movement is harmful internationally and discriminatory towards Jewish communities here in the UK, and why it is vital that Israel is named in the Bill.

I am not Jewish. I grew up in Dudley, where we do not have a Jewish community—I grew up hungry to know more about history and politics—but I when I was young my father worked for an Israeli company, ISCAR. He moved around jobs as a salesman, so I remembered his work by which country the company originated from. For me, Israel was just another one of those places where he had travelled for work. ISCAR was set up by Stef Wertheimer, a German-born Jew who fled the Nazis in 1937. He started a small metal shop and tool-making company called ISCAR in 1952.

Stef believes that capitalism is better equipped than politics to solve the conflict. He believes that, if economic disparity is at the core of the tension between Arabs and Jews, he might have a solution. In 2019, it was reported that of ISCAR's 3,500 employees, more than 1,000 are of Druze or Arab origin. In the eyes of the BDS movement, that normalisation is problematic and should be boycotted.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis) has already mentioned SodaStream, a successful Israeli company that exports its products across the world. It had been providing jobs to countless Israelis, as well as once employing about 900 Palestinians who relied on the company for their livelihoods. But in 2015, it was forced out of the west bank because of the BDS movement, leading to those Palestinians losing their jobs. That harms the very people the BDS movement claims to support. Ali Jafar, a shift manager from a west bank village, who worked for SodaStream for two years, summed it up when he said:

“All the people who wanted to close”

the factory

“are mistaken...They didn't take into consideration the families.”

It is those families we should think about when voting on the Bill.

When SodaStream closed its factory in the west bank, it moved to Rahat in the Negev desert. On the final day of Ramadan, it organised the largest Iftar celebration in Israel: almost 3,000 Israelis and Palestinians came together to break bread at the factory. The BDS movement remains against SodaStream's factory in the Negev desert because it has found new reasons for doing so. It said:

“SodaStream is still subject to boycott by the global, Palestinian-led BDS movement for Palestinian rights. Its new factory is actively complicit in Israel's policy of displacing the indigenous Bedouin-

Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Naqab (Negev). SodaStream's mistreatment of and discrimination against Palestinian workers is not forgotten either."

Why are the integration successes of companies such as SodaStream and ISCAR not told? Because they show normalisation; they show neighbourly relationships and peace between peoples. I have been struck by the stories of the Hamas hostages and their families. Some of them had lived in Gaza and moved when the occupation ended in 2005, but still have Palestinian friends there. We do not hear about those kinds of relationships. Extremists do not want to portray any kind of normal life, success or quality of existence, whether they are from Hamas or the BDS movement—neither promotes peaceful coexistence.

The BDS movement boasts that, in 18 years, it has done 18 years' worth of "turning darkness into light"—that is quite some sugar-coating if you ask me, Madam Deputy Speaker. The BDS movement has an anti-normalisation charter that forbids

"the participation in any project, initiative or activity, local or international, that brings together (on the same 'platform') Palestinians...and Israelis...and does not meet the following two conditions: (1) The Israeli side publicly recognizes the UN-affirmed inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are set out in the 2005 BDS Call, and"—

this is the most important part—

"(2) the joint activity constitutes a form of co-resistance against the Israeli regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid."

That is evidence, if it were ever needed, that the BDS movement does not want peace. BDS ignores or rejects the Jewish people's right to self-determination and occasionally calls for the eradication of Israel, the world's only Jewish state, so if BDS's objective is not peace, what is it? At its core, it is antisemitic. The Anti-Defamation League has assessed that BDS's campaigns often include allegations of Jewish power, dual loyalty, and Jewish/Israeli culpability for unrelated issues and crises.

I will now explain why this has such a negative impact on the Jewish community here in the UK. The Jewish Leadership Council has made the case that public bodies in the UK are more likely to interact with people than the Government are, and that it is therefore important they are trusted by all communities. The JLC believes that most relationships between Jewish communities and public bodies are usually positive, but that this is undermined when those bodies seek to involve themselves in international matters and support BDS movements.

The events of the past few weeks will, I hope, give many people a better understanding of why Israel is so important to the Jewish community. Having worked in the community, visited Israel a number of times and worked with holocaust survivors, I thought I understood, but for many in the Jewish community around the world, repeating that 7 October was the biggest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust brings with it unimaginable pain and a new understanding.

Israel's very existence was borne of the need for a safe haven for Jews. The events of 7 October were never meant to happen. Hamas knew they struck at the heart of Israel and, therefore, the heart of the Jewish community. When a movement seeks to single out the world's only Jewish state as a unique evil, it is clear why that could be regarded as antisemitic. There are no comparable campaigns about any other state on this scale—none that mobilise as many people and seek to divide and maintain division, rather than strive for peace.

If they were to have their way, supporters of BDS might claim victory; however, they cannot claim with any credibility to be supporters of a two-state solution. Boycotts harm Israel, they harm Palestinians, and they harm any prospect of peace. The Bill is not a barrier to peace: the BDS movement, and opposing the Bill, are barriers to peace. I applaud the Government for their strong stance in taking action against BDS and for bringing this Bill before the House, and I will be wholeheartedly supporting it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I will now announce the results of the ballot held today for the election of the Defence Committee Chair. Four hundred and thirty-three votes were cast, three of which were invalid. There was a single round of voting with 430 valid votes. The quota to be reached was therefore 216 votes. Robert Courts was elected Chair with 249 votes. He will take up his post immediately, and I congratulate him on his election. The results of the counts under the alternative vote system will be made available as soon as possible in the Vote Office and published on the internet.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I rise to speak to the amendment in my name, as well as amendment 13, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). Both relate to how the Bill will impact public bodies' rights to make ethical decisions on matters relating to international law and human rights, so that is the subject I will begin with.

Gaza, the United Nations has said, has become a "hellhole". Israeli bombs have decimated whole neighbourhoods. In six days alone, 6,000 bombs were dropped on the besieged enclave—more bombs than NATO forces dropped in an entire year of intense fighting in Afghanistan. An Israeli military spokesperson was frank about the purpose of the bombing:

"the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy".

Nearly 6,000 Palestinians have been killed, including nearly 2,500 children. Last night was the deadliest so far, with 700 people dead. This is happening to one of the most densely populated areas on earth, where 2.3 million people, half of whom are children, are trapped in an area no bigger than the Isle of Wight.

Even before the recent violence, Gaza had been besieged for more than a decade and a half, with access by land, air and water blocked. Back in 2010, even Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron called it a "prison camp", but now Israel has imposed a total siege, cutting off water, fuel, electricity and food. The UN says hospitals will run out of fuel today, and incubators with premature babies will stop working. Israel's evacuation order demanding that 1.1 million people flee their homes was described as

"impossible...without devastating human consequences"

by the United Nations, and the World Health Organisation has called it a

"death sentence for the sick and injured".

Indiscriminate bombing, collective punishment and forcibly displacing people are "clear violations" of international law—not according to me, but according to the United Nations Secretary-General. This is in no way downplaying or denying Hamas's appalling attacks on Israeli citizens, which I absolutely condemn, and I

[Zarah Sultana]

again echo the call for the release of hostages. Just as I and no Member here can imagine the fear and anguish of families who have seen loved ones taken hostage, I cannot imagine the terror of Palestinian families facing constant Israeli bombardment. On this question, the United Nations Secretary-General said yesterday: “International law is clear”. Yet in this House, people do not want to accept that. Hamas’s crimes in no way excuse what we have seen since.

That is relevant to this debate because these clear violations of international law have been given the green light by political leaders here in the UK and beyond, even with an Israeli defence official promising to turn Gaza into a “city of tents”. The Prime Minister has still refused to acknowledge these clear violations of international law and, unlike a growing number of his counterparts across the world, he is still refusing to call for an immediate ceasefire. That is utterly shameful, and it goes to the heart of the problem with this Bill and the need for these amendments.

Israel’s brutal war on Gaza is not an isolated example. For example, the Saudi-led war on Yemen, which I have spoken about repeatedly in this House, has claimed the lives of more than 150,000 people. It has included war crimes such as the Saudi bombing of a school bus, which killed more than 40 children and a dozen adults. That war has also been waged with the British Government’s support, including considerable military equipment and assistance.

Let us find some historical examples. Perhaps the most notable is the Government’s support for the apartheid South African regime, which people should be absolutely ashamed of and embarrassed about. The then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, called the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela “terrorists”, and Young Conservatives proudly wore badges calling for him to be hanged. In each of these cases—whether it is Israel’s war on Gaza, the Saudi war on Yemen or apartheid South Africa—violations of international law and gross injustices have been committed with the support and complicity of the British Government.

If the Bill is passed unamended, on these matters and more, public bodies such as local councils and universities will not be able to make ethical procurement or investment decisions. Local democracy will be sidelined, and they will be forced to ignore questions of human rights and international law. The case of South Africa shows most clearly why that would be such a mistake.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Zarah Sultana: I am going to continue.

While the Government supported the apartheid regime, local councils across the country rallied around the anti-apartheid movement, with 39 councils across the country having divested from companies operating in South Africa by 1985. If this Bill had been put in place then, that action would have been illegal. That is why a huge coalition of more than 70 organisations have come together to oppose it. Those organisations include trade unions such as ASLEF, the Fire Brigades Union, Unison and Unite, and campaign groups such as Greenpeace and Liberty.

Amendment 17, in my name, and amendment 13 seek to address this grave mistake by protecting the right of public bodies to make ethical decisions, not leaving them at the whim of the deeply unethical decisions of national Governments such as ours. I urge Members from across the House to support the amendments.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Some years ago, an elderly Jewish constituent came to see me in my surgery concerned about her own safety following a rise in violence in Israel and Palestine, and the resulting antisemitism here in the UK. I said to her then that, if the mob ever came for her, before they got to her they would find me standing in her driveway with my baseball bat in hand. I have stood with the Jewish community across the UK, particularly in London, over the last nearly 25 years of my political career.

When I am told that in seeking to improve this legislation, or in expressing doubts about its impact, I am somehow picking a side, with the implication that I am not standing with that community, I find it both insulting and offensive, particularly coming from Members of this House who, while accepting unquestioningly this legislation, have not done so with other legislation coming from the Government. We all have a duty at this point in time, as the Prime Minister and others have said, to choose our words carefully. On Monday, he said it was a time for “care and caution”, and he was exactly right.

4.30 pm

For those who say that there is never a good time, there is certainly a better time. As Israel reels from the profoundly evil crime that was committed against it, at the same time as Palestinian parents search in the rubble for the bodies of their children, for us to bring forward legislation that Members on the Government Benches have said in terms is picking a side seems remarkably insensitive, not least because our Prime Minister is frantically touring the world, trying his best to work with the Qataris and others to release those hostages. They must be released as soon as possible. I cannot see how choosing even to amend the programme motion to get this thing under the wire at this time is anything other than creating difficulties in that regard.

I have tabled five amendments to this legislation, and I seek to improve it. I understand that the Government are trying to pursue a manifesto commitment—a manifesto on which I stood—and while I might have doubts about the impact of this legislation on civic society generally, I recognise that there is some legitimacy to it. However, the form of the legislation matters. I will take my amendments in turn as they appear on the amendment paper.

First, amendment 7 goes to the heart of much of the objection that people have to this legislation. By carving out Israel, the west bank and the occupied Golan Heights in the legislation, I am afraid the Secretary of State is playing into the antisemitism we have seen rise in this country over the past few weeks. I quoted Jonathan Freedland on Second Reading, and it is worth quoting him again. He wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle*:

“What is the favourite refrain of the antisemites? That Israel is the one country you’re not ‘allowed’ to criticise. This bill takes a canard and, in the case of boycotts, turns it into the law of the land.”

There is no requirement in law for this carve-out to exist. If we agreed to amendment 7, the impact of the Bill would be precisely the same on a daily basis. Israel would merely be treated as all other countries in the world would be treated for the purposes of our legislation. The dreadful thing about this carve-out is that prior to this awful crime being committed, Israel was trying to achieve normalisation with its neighbours. With American sponsorship, it was in fruitful talks with countries that had been at loggerheads with it for years, yet here we are exceptionalising Israel again.

Amendment 7 also speaks to some significant legal concerns that have been expressed about the impact of this legislation under international law and on our undertakings at the United Nations, and about the conflation of the three territories and the signal it sends not only to Palestinians living in the west bank, but to those who occupy the Golan Heights. I would be interested to hear what the Secretary of State has to say about that issue. If clause 3(7) remains, I guarantee that this legislation will end up in the courts, and there will be wrangling for years before it is given any kind of effect.

Amendment 3 would amend clause 4 to lift the effective ban on criticism of this legislation by other elected individuals. Again, the proposals in the Bill strike at the very heart of what we try to achieve at every level of our democracy in this country, which is a sense of ethical and moral conduct, and that people should be able to express their views.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Like me, he has spent a lot of time in local government. Does he agree with the point I raised on Second Reading that a key issue is that our local elected brethren—for example, those specifically elected on a foreign policy platform, such as the 17 councillors who served at one stage on Birmingham City Council on behalf of the “Justice for Kashmir” party—may have a specific democratic reason for being there to express that foreign policy view? There will be circumstances in which councillors, including those who sit in the House of Lords and who sit as part of international bodies, such as the congress of the Council of Europe, benefit from parliamentary privilege in expressing their views. There is therefore a risk that this gagging order is not simply gagging what people should expect as freedom of speech, but is also ineffective in the objective it sets out to achieve.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend speaks with experience, and he puts it extremely well. To assume that councillors are merely elected on the basis of their attitude towards potholes and refuse collection is completely erroneous; they are elected for all sorts of reasons. Many councillors and Members of the devolved Administrations who campaign on social, moral, ethical and, indeed, foreign policy issues would say that they have a mandate, and not even to be able to express opposition to the law while still complying with it seems very un-British, extremely illiberal and unnecessarily draconian. We have lots of laws in this country to which councillors and, indeed, other elected officials of opposing political persuasions can express opposition. To have an exception on this basis seems faintly ridiculous.

On amendment 4, I declare my interest as a member of the local government pension fund, which I understand is the only pension fund affected by the Bill. As I said

on Second Reading, it is unfortunate that, as the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said, my accumulated savings are being put under the control of the Secretary of State. If, in pursuit of this control, my pension diminishes in value because I am forced to follow the decisions made by the Secretary of State, what will be my compensation in retirement?

Amendment 5 is about exempting universities as public bodies. There is a technical reason, as well as a principled reason, for this amendment. I outlined my objection on Second Reading, not least because we had just appointed a free speech tsar and legislated for free speech on university campuses, but here we are busily curtailing free speech through this Bill.

The technical issue is about universities being classified as public bodies. As the Secretary of State will know, there has been a flurry of activity in the Treasury because further education colleges have been classified as public bodies, which means all their debt comes on to the public balance sheet. This is another step towards universities, with their even greater levels of debt, coming on to the balance sheet, about which the Treasury ought to have a say. I hope and believe that, when the Bill goes to the House of Lords, the Treasury will want to have a look.

Finally, amendment 6 is about international law. I know that the Secretary of State, like every member of the Government, is extremely keen on international law and wants to ensure it is followed in all circumstances, and particularly in this current horrific conflict in Israel and Gaza. One of the great benefits of our more flexible system is that, as the Government called for boycotts of Russian businesses and Russian individuals following the invasion of Ukraine, other parts of civic society were able to move extremely quickly to comply, whereas under this legislation they would have to wait for the Government to issue some kind of regulation, which would have to go through this House and be debated. That could possibly take weeks, if not longer, particularly if the House is in recess. Amendment 6 proposes that if the Government declare that a country or situation is in breach of international law, other organisations can immediately respond by issuing their own sanctions or disinvestments.

I honestly believe that the amendments I have tabled—I understand that only amendment 7, which is probably the most important, will go to a Division this evening—represent an attempt to improve the legislation, rather than necessarily picking a side. Although this debate has, I am afraid, been positioned as a pro-Israel or pro-Palestine debate, I am primarily pro-Britain. I want to get the legislation right for this country, for the Jewish community and for every community in this country so that we can live with the consequences for years to come.

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind): Human rights groups have rightly condemned the Bill as an outrageous and unwarranted interference in the ability of councils, universities and other public bodies to use their purchasing power to pursue ethical procurement and investment policies in order to help defend human rights and tackle issues such as climate change. Everyone who cares about issues such as the illegal arms trade, activities of arms manufacturers and traders whose weapons fuel conflicts around the globe, or climate justice, correctly

[Claudia Webbe]

will be horrified by this blatant attack on the basic democratic rights of elected public bodies to act on behalf of the residents who elected them.

The Bill specifically protects the state of Israel, Israeli companies and their human rights abuses from local authority sanctions, no matter what human rights abuses they might commit or are committing now. It is self-evident that councils and other public bodies must be free—and, indeed, have a duty—to act to prevent or discourage breaches of international humanitarian law. It is clear that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, and no local authority or Government should offer support to such activity. The Government's anti-BDS Bill contradicts the guiding principles on business and human rights published by the United Nations. It penalises public bodies that comply with the UK's responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It takes away the democratic right of public bodies to make ethical financial decisions.

The Bill uniquely shields human rights abuses by Israel, allowing it to act with impunity. Indeed, the Bill exempts specific countries—namely Israel, despite its human rights abuses and war crimes—even though we do not know what future actions such countries may take. That is a show of complete contempt for the people of Palestine and the daily inhumanity, abuse and discrimination they face. The Bill is a textbook case of divide and rule politics.

It is profoundly disappointing that the Government are pursuing the anti-boycott Bill at this moment, when tensions are extremely high in our communities. In the past few weeks, almost 7,000 Palestinians have been killed—almost half of them children—and 1,400 Israelis have been killed, and the civilians of Gaza have been massacred by Israeli airstrikes. War crimes are happening in real time. An immediate ceasefire is required, and the Prime Minister, the Government, the Leader of the Opposition and all political leaders in this House should be calling for it.

Boycott, divestment and sanctions are an effective means of peaceful resistance. The Bill is no less toxic than at its previous stage. If it passes, it will close off a vital democratic avenue for the closest representatives of ordinary people at local level to demand accountability and change. It will show how little this Government care about the lives of civilians and the plight of persecuted and exploited communities around the world.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): I welcome this Bill, which fulfils a manifesto commitment and restates and protects the Government's foreign and trade policy prerogatives by preventing local authorities and other public bodies from pursuing politically motivated foreign policy objectives of their own. Some have said that the Bill would limit free speech, but that is not correct because individual councillors and public bodies can still say whatever they like as private citizens, as long as that speech is lawful. But local councils have no democratic mandate to use their control of taxpayers' funds and assets to create their own foreign policy or to express divisive opinions that undermine social cohesion in the communities for which they are responsible.

We have heard devolution spoken about in the Chamber. I am a supporter of devolution, but the whole point is that certain powers are devolved and certain powers

are not. When my constituents go to the ballot box at local elections, they vote for the candidate who they think is the best person to ensure regular bin collections, well-maintained roads or social care; they are not voting on foreign policy, defence policy or income tax rates, because these are nationally reserved issues for the Westminster Government. It is therefore unjustifiable for local authorities to pretend they have a democratic mandate to use ratepayers' money to signal their own foreign policy positions. This Bill does not restrict free speech; rather, it restricts public bodies from undermining policies decided nationally by a national Government elected in national ballots.

None of the amendments we are debating today would enhance the Bill, and in fact some are intended to make it unworkable. Amendment 4, for example, would make the pension scheme divestment provisions unworkable, and amendments 7 and 21 seek to remove an important clause relating to Israel. These amendments miss the crucial point of the Bill and the reason why it is being brought forward: all recorded recent examples of public bodies pursuing boycotts against foreign states or territories have been against Israel.

4.45 pm

BDS, which we have heard about extensively in today's debate, is unique in its targeting of the world's only Jewish state. The BDS movement is not a harmless, peaceful movement; it has alarming links to extremists, including the Hamas terrorist group, which have just committed probably the worst crimes in my lifetime—the worst mass killing of Jews since the holocaust. Public bodies funded by UK taxpayers should not be expressing public support for the divisive ideology advanced by the BDS movement. Its founder has, indeed, repeatedly expressed his opposition to Israel's right to exist as a state of the Jewish people and has endorsed Palestinian armed resistance. When public bodies seek to undermine British foreign and trade policy and choose to do that only for matters relating to Israel, it gives legitimacy to and encourages the sort of appalling antisemitic protests and attacks we have seen over the past few weeks.

Let me take my home city of Sheffield as an example. In 2019 the council passed a motion regarding its position on Palestine; it had nothing to do with the council's responsibilities as a local authority, but everything to do with its attempt to signal its anti-Israel political views. And in under a week's time, on 1 November, the Green party councillors will put forward a motion entitled "Stopping the Genocide in Gaza" that makes no mention of Hamas and their terrorism.

Since the horrific terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas, we have seen some shocking scenes on the streets of Sheffield: the Israeli flag torn down from the town hall; antisemitic chants on our streets; even a roadblock set up by supporters of Hamas, intimidating drivers and asking for money. I find it unbelievable and shameful that, after witnessing the despicable attacks, torture and rapes of Jewish civilians, such actions can take place in Sheffield, supposedly a "city of sanctuary". It is very difficult for the Jewish community in Sheffield to feel safe when the local authority—the official elected body—appears to align itself with hard-line anti-Israel movements.

That is why we need this Bill: because yet again Israel and the Jewish people are being singled out and subjected to discrimination across this country and across the world. This singling out of Israel, the only democracy

in the middle east, is just another form of the world's oldest prejudice. Of course the Government of Israel can be criticised by British citizens, as can any Government in the world, but it is unacceptable for local authorities and public bodies to abuse their position to make divisive political interventions for which they have no democratic mandate. That is why I support this Bill going forward unamended.

Steve McCabe: I want to begin by saying that I am not sure it is helpful to link these proceedings with the current crisis in Israel and Gaza, which is what some have sought to do in this debate. I think we should be careful about that and I want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) for the tone she adopted in her opening remarks and for her call for sensitivity and moderation in our approach to this issue.

The nature of the BDS campaign is to promote anti-normalisation: it encourages the notion that there should not be contact, trade, exchange, negotiation, or even dialogue with Israel. The founder of the BDS movement has repeatedly expressed his view that the Israeli state should not exist. For me, the aims of the movement are clear. Consequently, I am utterly opposed to the aims of BDS, and I believe that they are as detrimental to the interests of the people of this country as they are to the people of Israel and the Palestinians.

When I hear people talking about the BDS movement, I often think they completely misunderstand the exact nature of our relationships with Israel in trade, medicines, security and technological exchange, and how people in this country are kept healthier and safer as a result. I am therefore utterly opposed to BDS. Not only does it target Israel and hurt the Palestinians, it is also completely detrimental to the interests of the people of this country.

Just in passing, as a Birmingham MP, I want to refer to the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis), who is unfortunately no longer in his place. I want him to know that Veolia still has a contract with Birmingham City Council despite his great efforts to suggest that Birmingham was responsible for Veolia pulling out of Israel. I think he rather overstated the case.

I say to the Secretary of State and to the Minister, who was extremely courteous and reasonable throughout Committee, that after so many hours in Committee and such a period for reflection I am really disappointed that we have had so little movement from the Government on Report. I hate to say this, but I find it hard not to conclude that the aims and arguments of BDS may not be the total priority. I hope that I am wrong, and I hope that people can demonstrate that to me.

I remain strongly of the view that the Government would be well advised to drop clause 3(7) altogether, as I think it will probably make things worse. I find myself in total agreement with the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) on that. I also remain unconvinced by clause 4(1)(b).

I support amendments 16 and 13. I also support new clause 3, which seeks to provide protection for religious dietary requirements. I think it was mentioned that one of the BDS movement's proposals was to remove kosher food from supermarket shelves. I cannot believe that anyone in their right mind would think that a reasonable way to proceed, so I welcome the new clause.

We need a Bill to address the iniquities of the BDS movement. We need a Bill to unite people on both sides of the House who genuinely want consensus and broadly share the same aims. I regret that the Bill in its present form is not a piece of legislation that will achieve that outcome, and I urge Ministers to seek a consensus. There is still time to reconsider the approach.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It seems to fall to me to speak last in the debate from the Back Benches—*[Interruption.]* Ah, excellent. My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) and I may be on a similar theme. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe); if I am not mistaken, we visited Gaza together some 11 years ago. I think one colleague mentioned that the question tonight is, "Which side are you on?" I do not think that is the question at all. If I am asked that question, my answer is always the same: I am on the side of the United Kingdom. That, I believe, is where everyone in this House should be—with the possible exception of those who seek not to be in the United Kingdom. That requires me and all of us to define the national interest in the context of that and any proposed legislation.

We can define national interest in different ways: deep family ties with Commonwealth members; our close cultural and economic ties with our neighbours in Europe; our shared values with fellow democracies; and our historical links with nations around the world. But we would place first, surely, our security and the potential vulnerability of this nation to terrorists and nations abroad who would damage us. It is therefore strongly in our interests to bring forward legislation that builds bridges for communities both here and abroad as part of our role as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, committed to the rule of law and promoting the values of free speech and transparency, strong in the belief, for example, of democracies sticking to international rules of engagement because to do otherwise risks us descending to the level of the thugocracies that exist elsewhere.

Where does that leave me and us in today's debate? It means that we, without reservation, condemn the appalling acts of Hamas in their invasion of several villages and kibbutzes in southern Israel close to the border, their murder of civilians and their taking of hostages from, I believe, 41 countries. It means that we strongly support Israel's right of defence. But it also means that we believe that the invasion of Gaza by air, let alone by ground, has inevitably already caused as many, if not more, civilian casualties in ways that have already almost certainly broken the rules of international engagement, including in terms of access to water, electricity, fuel, medicines and so on.

I understand and accept that all infrastructure in Gaza is compromised by Hamas. There will be buildings and basements of schools and hospitals and so on that Hamas are using, but that does not justify, for example, bombing buildings of refuge in the compound of St Porphyrius. Our position in this nation is for a genuine two-state solution that allows for both the state of Israel, a remarkable state with so much to admire, and a state of Palestine, with people have suffered since the Nakba of 1948 over access to lands sometimes seized illegally in the occupied territories, as United Nations law makes clear. That is the right position,

[Richard Graham]

however difficult to achieve and however abused by this Israeli Government's continued deliberate building of illegal settlements in the occupied territories and by Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran's refusal to allow Israel to exist at all.

This, then, is the relevance of a pro-UK policy to this particular Bill. Into this delicate landscape of increasing polarisation throughout the middle east strides the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill. I agree with the principle of reducing local government posturing on foreign policy—some of us are old enough to remember the Labour Lambeth Borough Council's nuclear free zone—and the principle of the Bill can be reasonably in the national interest. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak and many others on both sides of the House that the BDS movement is clearly antisemitic. It is clearly aimed at Israel. There is no question about that. But at the same time, when my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) advised that we should therefore stop everything regardless and support Israel and its Government's statements on any issue regardless, I do not think that that is the case. Our support should not be at the price of explicitly giving the Israeli Government a completely free hand in their policy towards the west bank and the occupied territories, riding roughshod through UN Security Council motions drafted by the United Kingdom. Without them, the facts on the ground, as the Government like to call them, make a two-state solution harder and harder. Therefore, the motivation behind the drafting of amendment 7, which I am supporting so strongly, is not to bow down before threats by Hamas and those who wish for no state of Israel at all. It is not to support the constituent of mine who said to me, during a peace march—note the irony of those words—that Hitler had a point. No, I am not backing amendment 7 to support anything like that. I am doing so because there are many others among my constituents and other Muslims in this country who do believe in a two-state solution and who do want to see peace.

5 pm

I believe that the representatives of those Arab Governments who have reached agreement with Israel and signed the Abraham accords have done so because they do not want to see Israel destroyed and they do want to see peace in the middle east, and I do not believe that any of them would support the clauses in this Bill that prevent us from holding the occupation—the illegal occupation—by Israeli settlers to account. Although I also support other amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), who spoke so well this evening, it is principally amendment 7 that gives us a chance to put the Bill back on the right track by removing an aspect of it that prevents or, at the very least, inhibits us from holding the Israeli Government to account in the way in which so many people in this country and abroad would like.

This is not about being naive; it is about recognising that the BDS movement is deeply unpleasant, and is targeting Israel. Yes, we must be vigilant against both antisemitism and Islamophobia, but we should not exclude holding Israel to account. That is why I am supporting amendment 7 this evening.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham). I, too, wish to speak in particular about amendment 7, tabled by the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse).

It is with a heavy heart that I am taking part in this debate. I was half minded not to do so, because now is not the time. The impact of the awful violence in Israel and Palestine on communities across the world cannot be underestimated, but the answer is not to debate the Bill right now. By all means let us have some space, some time: there have only been statements, and we have not had a chance to talk about it. By all means let us do that, but not this. It was unwise even to table the debate for this week, and on Monday I urged the Prime Minister to change his mind. In his response, he spoke about the importance of not undermining “community cohesion”. I politely suggest that if a Government do not want to undermine community cohesion, the last thing they should do is introduce a Bill such as this.

May I associate myself with the arguments advanced by the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge)? What she said was exactly what members of my Jewish community have said to me. They are appalled that the Government are choosing to play politics at this time. The Bill was divisive at the best of times, and the fact is that this is the worst of times. That holds true regardless of what we may think of the Bill's contents. The Liberal Democrats are on the record as registering our opposition to specific clauses on Second Reading, but I am here primarily to talk about the timing.

Amendment 7 cuts to the chase. It addresses the fact that on the face of the Bill, in clause 3, is a reference to the conflict in Israel and Palestine—a conflict that has cost thousands of innocent lives over the past three weeks, and a conflict in respect of which intense diplomacy is required. I am shocked that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, having toured the middle east and having understood the strength of feeling but also the sensitivities, have decided that this in any way helps them to do their very important jobs. Make no mistake: those leaders in the Arab world are watching what is happening here today, and I do not think that it shows us in the best light. If the Prime Minister backs two states and wants to take any sort of lead, he needs to mean it.

I am sorry to say that arranging for this Bill to be debated this week is not the mark of a statesman. It is a disgrace. It is a disgrace because this conflict is affecting families across the UK as well as those abroad. Maybe they are fearful of becoming the victims of hate crime. We have seen a dreadful rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia over the last three weeks. The Community Security Trust has recorded the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents across this 17-day period. Or maybe they are fearful for their family in the region. I have spoken many times already about my fears for my extended family in Gaza. Or maybe they are fearful for their loved ones who are being held hostage by Hamas. If we are going to engage in this conflict, we should speak about how to get those hostages freed.

Earlier this week, I and my party leader met some of those families, including the aunt of Ariel and Kfir, who are four years old and nine months old. I was disgusted to see a picture of four-year-old Ariel defaced with horns and Hitler imagery at a bus stop in Finchley

this morning—an utterly grotesque act. I hope the perpetrators are caught and the full force of the law is applied. This hateful antisemitism has no place in our society, and that is not up for debate.

On Palestinians, we should be speaking about the situation on the ground in Gaza and how we can get aid in. Children in Gaza are writing their names on their hands so that if they are killed, they can be buried with their families. I attended a vigil yesterday where we mourned those innocent children whose lives have been needlessly lost. It is not right that innocent Palestinians are being held accountable for Hamas's atrocities.

I have heard arguments, primarily from the Government Benches, that Hamas are purportedly telling people not to move and find safety, but that is not what I am hearing—certainly not from my own family. I find it deeply offensive for people to suggest that Hamas are giving my family orders. The reason people are not moving is that they are frail and cannot move, but even if they do, the south is being bombed too. The conversation has changed in Gaza. No longer do they ask, “Where do I go to be safe?”. The question now is, “Where do I go to die?”. So how are we to facilitate releasing those hostages? How are we to safeguard innocent civilian lives? It is through a humanitarian ceasefire. That is a position backed by the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, United States Secretary of State Blinken and—finally, it seems—the Government this morning.

What the House should be doing at this time is digging deep into our humanity and our compassion. It is a time for leadership, for soothing words and for calm to bring people together—all people, directly affected or not—and to demonstrate, by what we do here, how to let the light pierce into the darkness and despair. So I support amendment 7 wholeheartedly and I believe that this place can and should offer more than division.

Let me make my final point very clearly. I do not want something like this to drive a wedge between any Members in this House and our Jewish community. I stood with members of my Jewish community in Oxford in the first week of the attack and I grieved with them. We shed tears together. I stand shoulder to shoulder with them now. We all stand shoulder to shoulder with them now. I say to those Members who suggest that I should pick a side or, even worse, that by not voting with the Government today I am against peace: how dare they? I will tell them what I am on the side of. I am on the side of basic humanity. I am on the side of those who want to bring consensus. I am on the side of the Israeli community, the Palestinian community and the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. This is a tragedy that affects the whole world, and I say to this Government: do better.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I support the amendments in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and wish to speak specifically to amendments 7 and 3.

This Bill was introduced pursuant to a Conservative manifesto commitment at the last general election, “to ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycotts, disinvestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries.”

It is important to note that the wording of that commitment is not country-specific. It is agnostic. But it is very clear from the debate thus far, most particularly on Second

Reading but also today, that the measures contained in the Bill are aimed primarily at the BDS campaign that has for some two decades targeted the state of Israel. This is quite proper. Foreign policy in this country, as other hon. Members have said, should be determined by the Government of this country, not by local authorities or other public bodies.

The Bill is broadly drawn, except in one respect, which paradoxically robs it of its breadth. It contains a specific measure to prevent any attempt at a later date to modify its provisions in respect of the conduct of the Government of Israel in relation to the territory of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the occupied Golan Heights. It is clear from the Secretary of State's remarks on Second Reading that the principal mischief that the Government intend to target is the undoubted evil of antisemitism and antisemitic behaviour, which have been among the most regrettable—in fact, deplorable—consequences of the BDS campaign. Clamping down on antisemitism is obviously important. Indeed, it is essential. No one would dispute that it is a good thing. In fact, given current events in and close to Gaza—and, indeed, on the streets of London—doing everything possible to prevent it is very much a priority.

It is more than arguable that in the case of public bodies, there is a legislative vehicle for doing that already, in the shape of the Equality Act 2010, most particularly section 149, which imposes a “public sector equality duty” on such bodies, requiring them to pay

“due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons”

of different religions, ethnicities and nationalities. However, the Government have decided that the Equality Act is insufficient and have decided to go further by effectively outlawing the activities of the BDS movement in relation to Israel only, using this Bill as the vehicle. That is not a country-agnostic ambition of the sort envisaged in the manifesto commitment.

This is a broad Bill with one particularly anomalous element. As such, it throws up problems, which the amendments seek to rectify. Amendment 7 addresses the problem that arises under clause 3(5), which provides that

“The Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office may, by regulations, specify a country or territory as one in relation to which section 1 does not apply.”—

in other words, permitting a public body to make a procurement or investment decision in such a way as to express political or moral disapproval of the conduct of a foreign state. Clause 3(7), however, goes on to provide that such regulations may not specify Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the occupied Golan Heights. The effect of clause 3(7), therefore, is to make it absolutely clear that the sole purpose of this Bill is to give total and unique protection to Israel from BDS activity.

I do not believe that it should be necessary to state that in the Bill. There may well be future circumstances in which it would be appropriate and desirable for public bodies to seek to express disapproval of the conduct of a foreign state. If any regulations were made permitting such conduct, they would self-evidently be done in circumstances in which they were approved of by the Government. However, excepting Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the occupied Golan Heights from the ministerial power to make such regulations is a

[Mr David Jones]

very strange approach. In the first place, it is not, as I have said, country neutral, which it should be. The absence of neutrality may indeed cause offence to people from other countries around the world, not least those moderate Islamic states that are doing their very best at the moment to try to defuse the tension that has arisen in the middle east. Moreover, it creates an unacceptable equivalence between the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights, both of which are arguably illegally occupied and are certainly in the view of the Government in the case of the OPTs illegally settled, and that of the sovereign territory of Israel itself. That is a matter, I am afraid, that is likely to attract significant international criticism as it may well put the United Kingdom in breach of its obligations under UN Security Council resolution 2334. Being found to be in breach of that resolution is not something that the Government should be happy to risk.

5.15 pm

Secondly, that exception is frankly perplexing. It means that if at some future time the Government were to decide to show disapproval of the actions of the state of Israel, a Cabinet Minister would not be able to do so without launching stand-alone primary legislation. How can that possibly be a sensible approach? And why is it necessary? Are Secretaries of State and Cabinet Office Ministers so capricious, so inclined to engage in frolics of their own, that they will pursue measures that are not approved of by the Government? Are they not trusted by the Government to behave responsibly, and, if not, why are they members of the Government at all? The provision is illogical, unnecessary and potentially damaging to the interests of the United Kingdom and its reputation and I believe that the amendment is therefore entirely right.

Amendment 3 seeks to remove clause 4(1)(b), which constitutes a perplexing and unacceptable constraint on free speech. If decision makers are prevented from making a particular investment or procurement decision because of the provisions of the Bill, if indeed it is enacted, that should be the end of the matter. There is no good reason in a free country why they should be precluded from saying what they would have done were it not against the law to do so.

This is a Conservative Government. Conservatives believe in and value free speech. Indeed, the Government have recently legislated to protect freedom of speech under the law in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which makes this provision all the more anomalous. I find myself in the extraordinary position of agreeing entirely with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) in this regard. This is a deeply un-Conservative measure and I believe that the amendment is right and that the provision should go.

Michael Gove: I thank all Members who have contributed to this debate for the thought and care that they have given to the legislation before us. I appreciate that we are debating these measures at a sensitive time and that, across the House, people will place different emphases on aspects of the legislation and the broader issues with which it deals.

Let me be clear: I have respect for everyone who has spoken and the arguments that they have made. Where there is disagreement, it is in the context of everyone in this House being united in their horror of terrorism, their desire for peace and their belief in a two-state solution.

We are seeking in the Bill to give effect to a manifesto commitment, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) has just pointed out. The Bill was introduced earlier this year. Indeed, it completed its Committee stage under the careful and thoughtful stewardship of the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), with contributions from all sides of merit, thought and care.

Of course, those debates took place before the horrific events of 7 October, to which so many colleagues in this debate have referred. It is important to remember—I do not think that anyone in the House can forget—that on 7 October we saw the largest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust. That atrocity was perpetrated by terrorists from Hamas whose aim is very clear and very simple: the elimination of the Jewish state, the elimination of Jewish lives. Whatever the background beliefs or origin of those Jewish lives, they were to be exterminated.

More than 200 hostages are still being held by Hamas in Gaza. Across the House, we grieve for them and their families. I thank in particular the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), with whom I have been in touch, who have been working very hard to ensure that their constituents are released and brought home. I also thank the shadow Business Secretary, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), who joined me and many Members from all parties at a vigil in Trafalgar Square on Sunday to call for the return of those hostages.

We also sympathise across the House with the innocent people of Gaza, and with all those Palestinian people who have suffered. We recognise that many of the innocent people in Gaza are hostages too. They are hostages of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the other terrorist organisations that operate within that territory. It is vital at all times that we draw a distinction between those who suffer in Gaza and those who are perpetrating suffering in the name of terrorism.

I am very conscious that we are debating these issues against that backdrop, but it is important that we look at the principles behind the Bill. I also thank our friend, the ambassador of the state of Israel, who is here in the Gallery to listen to our considerations. She and other ambassadors have been working with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that every hostage is released back to their Jewish home with their family.

It is important to recognise what the Bill does not do. A number of legitimate concerns were expressed that actually do not reflect what is in the Bill and what the Bill is intended to achieve. The Bill does not prevent any individual from articulating their support for the BDS campaign, or indeed any particular policy that the BDS campaign puts forward. It simply prevents public bodies and public money being used to advance that case. Any of us as individuals has a total right to freedom of speech. However offensive or difficult some of the words that some utter might be, free speech is not affected by the Bill.

The Bill also does not prevent human rights considerations from being taken into account by local authorities. The Bill makes it clear that legitimate human rights considerations, provided that they are non-country-specific, should be taken into account. I note the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) about animal welfare. If specific human rights considerations need to be added to the Bill, we will consider that in the Lords. I also note the comments made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). We want to ensure that there is a robust way of ensuring that local authorities can uphold human rights on a non-country-specific basis.

I noted some of the concerns expressed about the impact on the local government pension scheme. Let me stress again that there is no damage to the fiduciary duty that trustees of the scheme will have to uphold in ensuring that they secure the best value on their investments for their members. What the Bill does do is deal with the broad principle that foreign policy should be reserved to this House. It is important to stress that when other public bodies take a stand on foreign policy, they risk vitiating the power of both the Government and the House to achieve goals for the benefit of the United Kingdom and risk creating specific community tensions.

Talking of specific community tensions takes us, of course, to the specific menace that is the BDS movement. It is of course possible for local government to consider adopting boycotts in a variety of ways, but the truth is that if we look at local government and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) pointed out, at the devolved Administrations, the only country that has been singled out so far for boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns has been Israel. Let us not hide from that fact.

The reason for that is that the BDS campaign is in itself antisemitic. It is not exercising disapproval of some particular foreign policy or domestic policy decision of the state of Israel; it is saying that Israel should not exist. It is instructive, though not easy, to look at the communications that the BDS movement has issued on social media since 7 October—not one word of sympathy for the Israeli people in their suffering. Indeed, what it has said on social media, when talking of those deaths, is that “their blood”—the blood of the Jewish people; the Israeli people killed—

“is on the hands of the Israeli government.”

The BDS campaign has said that the “root cause” of this violence—the deaths on 7 October—

“must be acknowledged...Israel as the occupier.”

The BDS movement has cited a variety of politicians as what they call “partners in genocide”: Rishi Sunak, Joe Biden, Olaf Scholz and Ursula von der Leyen. Of course, the BDS campaign also continues to repeat the lie—the blood libel—that it was the Israeli Defence Forces who were responsible for the tragic loss of life at the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza. That is what we are dealing with, and I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) for making clear the horror that he and so many of us hold for the BDS movement.

There is an argument that perhaps this Bill is divisive and it is not wanted, particularly by many voices in the Jewish community. There are some voices in the Jewish community who have concerns, and we have listened to

them, but the representative bodies that speak for Britain’s Jewish community are united in supporting this Bill. They include the Board of Deputies, which contains representatives of every Jewish constituency, Jewish organisation and every Jewish community, be it secular or religious, and the Jewish Leadership Council, which contains representatives of every political and faith tradition within the Jewish community. We have heard reference made to the increase we have seen—it is horrific to think about it—in antisemitic incidents in recent weeks. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) made reference to the Community Security Trust. I have been in contact with it this afternoon and it sent me this message:

“BDS has a chilling impact on Jews, a modern reminder of anti-Jewish boycotts. It also serves to legitimise the shunning of Jews from ‘decent’ society. And having been shunned...that’s a half way house to all manner of more abusive and physical outcomes.”

So we respect the diversity of voices, but when we have such unity from those who speak for the Jewish community—indeed, the Jewish communities—of the UK, when they are so clear that this legislation is in the interests of community cohesion, fighting antisemitism and making the UK a safe house for everyone, we should treat their words with respect.

The point has been made that the specific mention in the Bill of Israel could perhaps, in some cases, engender a greater degree of polarisation and antisemitism. I know that the people who make that argument make it sincerely, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) pointed out, sometimes we just have to stand up for what is right. If there are people who are provoked as a result of that, it is regrettable but we should not shy away from telling the truth. We should not shy away from saying that what has been going on with Gaza’s genocidal campaign against the Jewish people is something that we as a country need to stand against. When the BDS campaign has in its leadership the leaders of Hamas, we need to be clear about this evil and this menace. That is not just my argument; it is also the argument of the Jewish community organisations that I cited earlier, including the Jewish Leadership Council. In its submission to the Committee considering this Bill, it said:

“The inclusion of clause 3(7) recognises this unique nature of the BDS campaign against Israel”.

It stated its belief that if that provision were excised, as one amendment seeks to achieve,

“the very purpose of the bill would be undermined. Such a change would...convert a bill aiming to prevent anti-Israel BDS campaigns from abusing our public bodies into a tool to facilitate it.”

It is debatable, of course, whether this is the right way forward—the Jewish Leadership Council is very clear that it is—but I simply ask: after everything we have seen in the past three weeks, if this House were now to remove a specific protection for the state of Israel at this time, what message would it send? I submit to every Member of this House that we should listen to the Jewish community and the clarity with which they speak.

Chris Stephens: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the tone he has adopted so far, as it is important that we adopt the correct tone in this debate. Does he recognise the concerns that not just Israel is mentioned in the clause? This is also about why the Government have included

[Chris Stephens]

the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights. That has also aroused some comment, debate and criticism.

Michael Gove: I take the hon. Gentleman's point and appreciate the concerns that he articulates, which are shared by a number of people, but the way in which the Bill is designed makes it clear that there is a separation between Israel, the OPTs and the Golan Heights. As the Jewish Leadership Council pointed out in its evidence to the Committee on which the hon. Gentleman served with distinction:

"This clause recognises this distinction"—
it absolutely does—

"and closes a loophole to ensure public bodies cannot remain tools of the BDS movement against Israel."

It is also the case that, by making that distinction, the clause—and the Bill overall—reserves to the UK Government the role of maintaining, as we do, our absolute commitment to a two-state solution. As framed, then, the Bill is absolutely not in breach of international law. It enables the UK Government to speak with one voice on behalf of the entire United Kingdom in our determination to secure a two-state solution, however distant that prospect may be at the moment.

Richard Graham: I am interested in clause 3, which specifically states that the exceptions to any prohibition are:

"(a) Israel...(b) the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or...(c) the Occupied Golan Heights."

What is the distinction between Israel and those two that means that we can still hold the Government of the day accountable for illegal settler occupations in those two occupied areas?

Michael Gove: The fact that they are listed separately and individually affirms the absolutely principal purpose of treating them individually and separately. Were—
[Interruption.] I am sorry, but if Opposition Front Benchers think it is appropriate to smile, laugh and joke about this issue, I regret that. If people disagree in a principled fashion, I respect that. But the key thing is that we know there are people who have attempted to use language relating to what happens in the occupied territories—indeed, the former Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis), cited a number of examples of this—specifically to seek to target people on the basis of their Jewish identity, and that is wrong.

Andrew Percy: There is another point. If we accept, as everybody who has spoken today has apparently accepted, that the BDS campaign is a pernicious, antisemitic campaign, we should know that it is pernicious and antisemitic whether it is against the state of Israel or against products that come from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The BDS campaign should be outlawed wherever it takes place. It is very simple.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North again made it clear that in France and Germany the BDS campaign is outlawed in

the way that we seek to do here. No one denies for a moment that France and Germany, under Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz, are valued partners for peace and upholders of international law.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): On international agreements, does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that the United Kingdom is party to a series of World Trade Organisation framework agreements, such as the general procurement agreement, the UK has a duty not to discriminate in its trade practices, and that to permit public bodies to engage in antisemitic BDS activities would undermine our international agreements?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I thank him for his thoughtful contribution.

I recognise the sincerity and commitment of my opposite number, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). Both she and her predecessor, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), have been brave and forthright in calling out antisemitism wherever it occurs. I thank her for her work and the conversations we have had formally and informally on this issue. It is for that reason that I say, with respect, that I disagree. I understand the intent of the proposal from Labour's Front-Bench team, but I disagree, because—as they acknowledge in their own amendment for ensuring that people cannot adopt, through an ambiguous form of words, a means of preventing people from accessing kosher or halal food—there is the potential, as lawyers have been clear, for an ambiguous form of words to be used in order, without mentioning Israel by name, to make it clear that a boycott campaign is directed against Israel. I think we all have a duty to be clear about that.

The BDS movement is clear in what it upholds: an evil campaign not just to eliminate the state of Israel but to target Palestinians who work with Israeli institutions. It has been crystal clear in recent weeks in its total failure—not just a failure, but a conscious desire not to express a shred of sympathy or regret for the loss of innocent lives. It is clear about what it wants to do to sow division. It is clear that its actions lead to, and have always led to, an increase in antisemitic attacks.

Those who speak for the Jewish community in this country have been clear as well. They respect the diversity and plurality of opinions in this House. They respect the motives, they respect the feelings, they respect the strong emotions that these issues engage. But they have also been clear that they wish this legislation to pass, they wish it to pass unamended, and they wish it to pass now. I honour them in their suffering, and it is for that reason that I urge the House to reject the amendments and to pass the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Does Chris Stephens wish to press new clause 1 to a Division?

Chris Stephens: No, Madam Deputy Speaker. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

EXCEPTIONS

Amendment proposed: 14, page 2, line 17, leave out subsections (2) and (3).—(Angela Rayner.)

This amendment would remove provisions allowing Ministers to amend the Schedule, via regulations, to add a description of decision or consideration, or amend or remove considerations added under previous regulations.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 273.

Division No. 352]

[5.36 pm

AYES

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Abrahams, Debbie | Fletcher, Colleen |
| Ali, Rushanara | Foord, Richard |
| Ali, Tahir | Fovargue, Yvonne |
| Anderson, Fleur | Foxcroft, Vicky |
| Ashworth, rh Jonathan | Foy, Mary Kelly |
| Barker, Paula | Gibson, Patricia |
| Beckett, rh Margaret | Gill, Preet Kaur |
| Begum, Apsana | Glindon, Mary |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Grant, Peter |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Green, Sarah |
| Blackman, Kirsty | Greenwood, Margaret |
| Blomfield, Paul | Griffith, Dame Nia |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Gwynne, Andrew |
| Brock, Deidre | Haigh, Louise |
| Brown, Alan | Hamilton, Fabian |
| Brown, Ms Lyn | Hanvey, Neale |
| Bryant, Sir Chris | Hardy, Emma |
| Buck, Ms Karen | Harris, Carolyn |
| Burton, Richard | Hayes, Helen |
| Byrne, Ian | Hendrick, Sir Mark |
| Cadbury, Ruth | Hillier, Dame Meg |
| Callaghan, Amy (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Marion Fellows</i>) | Hobhouse, Wera |
| Campbell, rh Sir Alan | Hodge, rh Dame Margaret |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Hodgson, Mrs Sharon |
| Champion, Sarah | Hollern, Kate |
| Cherry, Joanna | Hopkins, Rachel |
| Cooper, Daisy | Hosie, rh Stewart |
| Cooper, rh Yvette | Huq, Dr Rupa |
| Cowan, Ronnie | Hussain, Imran |
| Creasy, Stella | Jarvis, Dan |
| Cruddas, Jon | Johnson, rh Dame Diana |
| Cryer, John | Johnson, Kim |
| Cummins, Judith | Jones, Darren |
| Cunningham, Alex | Jones, rh Mr Kevan |
| Daby, Janet | Jones, Ruth |
| Davey, rh Ed | Jones, Sarah |
| David, Wayne | Kane, Mike |
| Davies-Jones, Alex | Keeley, Barbara |
| De Cordova, Marsha | Kendall, Liz |
| Debbonaire, Thangam | Khan, Afzal |
| Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh | Kinnock, Stephen |
| Dixon, Samantha | Kyle, Peter |
| Dodds, Anneliese | Lake, Ben |
| Doogan, Dave | Lammy, rh Mr David |
| Dorans, Allan (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Marion Fellows</i>) | Law, Chris |
| Doughty, Stephen | Leadbeater, Kim |
| Dowd, Peter | Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma |
| Duffield, Rosie | Lewis, Clive |
| Dyke, Sarah | Lightwood, Simon |
| Eagle, rh Maria | Linden, David |
| Eastwood, Colum | Lloyd, Tony |
| Edwards, Jonathan | Lucas, Caroline |
| Edwards, Sarah | Lynch, Holly |
| Efford, Clive | Madders, Justin |
| Elliott, Julie | Mahmood, Mr Khalid |
| Elmore, Chris | Mahmood, Shabana |
| Eshalomi, Florence | Malhotra, Seema |
| Esterson, Bill | Mather, Keir |
| Evans, Chris | McCabe, Steve |
| Fellows, Marion | McCarthy, Kerry |
| | McDonagh, Siobhain |
| | McDonald, Andy |

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote*
cast by Marion Fellows)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie

Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shanks, Michael
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Strathern, Alistair
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Tonia Antoniazzi

NOES

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Afolami, Bim | Bowie, Andrew |
| Afriyie, Adam | Bradley, Ben |
| Aiken, Nickie | Brady, Sir Graham |
| Aldous, Peter | Braverman, rh Suella |
| Allan, Lucy (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Mr Marcus Jones</i>) | Brereton, Jack |
| Anderson, Lee | Bridgen, Andrew |
| Anderson, Stuart | Browne, Anthony |
| Andrew, rh Stuart | Bruce, Fiona |
| Ansell, Caroline | Buchan, Felicity |
| Argar, rh Edward | Buckland, rh Sir Robert |
| Atkins, Victoria | Burghart, Alex |
| Bacon, Gareth | Cairns, rh Alun |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Cameron, Dr Lisa |
| Bailey, Shaun | Carter, Andy |
| Baillie, Siobhan | Cartlidge, James |
| Baker, Duncan | Cash, Sir William |
| Baker, Mr Steve | Cates, Miriam |
| Barclay, rh Steve | Caulfield, Maria |
| Baron, Mr John | Chalk, rh Alex |
| Baynes, Simon | Churchill, Jo |
| Bell, Aaron | Clark, rh Greg |
| Benton, Scott | Clarke, rh Sir Simon |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Clarke, Theo |
| Bhatti, Saqib | Clarke-Smith, Brendan |
| Blackman, Bob | Clarkson, Chris |
| Bottomley, Sir Peter | Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey |
| | Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse |

Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alistair
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
Joy Morrissey

Question accordingly negated.

5.49 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Amendment proposed: 13, in clause 3, page 2, line 40, at end insert—

“(4A) Section 1 does not apply to a decision which has been made in accordance with a Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights.

(4B) A Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights—

(a) is a public authority’s policy criteria relating to disinvestment in cases concerning contravention of human rights; and

(b) must be applied consistently by the public authority to all foreign countries.

(4C) Within 60 days of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish, and lay before Parliament, guidance on the form, content and application of Statements for the purposes of this section

(4D) Public authorities must have regard to the guidance referenced in subsection (4C) when devising a Statement.”—
(Angela Rayner.)

This amendment would exempt public bodies from the prohibition in section 1, where the decision has been made in accordance with a Statement of Policy Relating to Human Rights. A Statement may not single out individual nations, but would have to be applied consistently, and in accordance with guidance published by the Secretary of State.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 197, Noes 276.

Division No. 353]

[5.49 pm

AYES

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Abrahams, Debbie | Eshalomi, Florence |
| Ali, Rushanara | Esterson, Bill |
| Ali, Tahir | Evans, Chris |
| Anderson, Fleur | Fellows, Marion |
| Ashworth, rh Jonathan | Fletcher, Colleen |
| Barker, Paula | Foord, Richard |
| Begum, Apsana | Fovargue, Yvonne |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Foxcroft, Vicky |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Foy, Mary Kelly |
| Blackman, Kirsty | Gibson, Patricia |
| Blomfield, Paul | Gill, Preet Kaur |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Glindon, Mary |
| Brock, Deidre | Grant, Peter |
| Brown, Alan | Green, Sarah |
| Brown, Ms Lyn | Greenwood, Margaret |
| Bryant, Sir Chris | Griffith, Dame Nia |
| Burgon, Richard | Haigh, Louise |
| Byrne, Ian | Hamilton, Fabian |
| Cadbury, Ruth | Hanvey, Neale |
| Callaghan, Amy (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Marion Fellows</i>) | Hardy, Emma |
| Campbell, rh Sir Alan | Harris, Carolyn |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Hayes, Helen |
| Champion, Sarah | Hendrick, Sir Mark |
| Cherry, Joanna | Hillier, Dame Meg |
| Cooper, Daisy | Hobhouse, Wera |
| Cooper, rh Yvette | Hodge, rh Dame Margaret |
| Cowan, Ronnie | Hodgson, Mrs Sharon |
| Creasy, Stella | Hollern, Kate |
| Cruddas, Jon | Hopkins, Rachel |
| Cryer, John | Hosie, rh Stewart |
| Cummins, Judith | Huq, Dr Rupa |
| Cunningham, Alex | Hussain, Imran |
| Daby, Janet | Jarvis, Dan |
| Davey, rh Ed | Johnson, rh Dame Diana |
| David, Wayne | Johnson, Kim |
| Davies-Jones, Alex | Jones, Darren |
| De Cordova, Marsha | Jones, rh Mr Kevan |
| Debbonaire, Thangam | Jones, Ruth |
| Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh | Jones, Sarah |
| Dixon, Samantha | Kane, Mike |
| Dodds, Anneliese | Keeley, Barbara |
| Doogan, Dave | Kendall, Liz |
| Dorans, Allan (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Marion Fellows</i>) | Khan, Afzal |
| Doughty, Stephen | Kinnock, Stephen |
| Dowd, Peter | Kyle, Peter |
| Duffield, Rosie | Lake, Ben |
| Dyke, Sarah | Lammy, rh Mr David |
| Eagle, rh Maria | Law, Chris |
| Eastwood, Colum | Leadbeater, Kim |
| Edwards, Jonathan | Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma |
| Edwards, Sarah | Lewis, Clive |
| Efford, Clive | Lightwood, Simon |
| Elliott, Julie | Linden, David |
| Elmore, Chris | Lloyd, Tony |
| | Lucas, Caroline |
| | Lynch, Holly |

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Madders, Justin | Rayner, rh Angela |
| Mahmood, Mr Khalid | Reed, Steve |
| Mahmood, Shabana | Reeves, Ellie |
| Malhotra, Seema | Ribeiro-Addy, Bell |
| Mather, Keir | Rimmer, Ms Marie |
| McCabe, Steve | Rodda, Matt |
| McCarthy, Kerry | Russell-Moyle, Lloyd |
| McDonagh, Siobhain | Saville Roberts, rh Liz |
| McDonald, Andy | Shah, Naz |
| McDonald, Stewart Malcolm | Shanks, Michael |
| McDonald, Stuart C. | Siddiq, Tulip |
| McDonnell, rh John | Smith, Jeff |
| McFadden, rh Mr Pat | Smith, Nick |
| McGovern, Alison | Smyth, Karin |
| McKinnell, Catherine | Sobel, Alex |
| McLaughlin, Anne | Stephens, Chris |
| McMahon, Jim | Stevens, Jo |
| McMorrin, Anna | Stone, Jamie |
| Miliband, rh Edward | Strathern, Alistair |
| Mishra, Navendu | Sultana, Zarah |
| Monaghan, Carol | Tami, rh Mark |
| Moran, Layla | Tarry, Sam |
| Morden, Jessica | Thewliss, Alison |
| Morgan, Helen | Thomas, Gareth |
| Morgan, Stephen | Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick |
| Morris, Grahame | Thompson, Owen |
| Murray, Ian | Thomson, Richard |
| Murray, James | Thornberry, rh Emily |
| Nandy, Lisa | Turner, Karl |
| Newlands, Gavin | Twist, Liz |
| Nichols, Charlotte | Vaz, rh Valerie |
| Nicolson, John (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Marion Fellows</i>) | Wakeford, Christian |
| Norris, Alex | Webbe, Claudia |
| O'Hara, Brendan | West, Catherine |
| Onwurah, Chi | Western, Andrew |
| Oppong-Asare, Abena | Western, Matt |
| Osborne, Kate | Whitehead, Dr Alan |
| Oswald, Kirsten | Williams, Hywel |
| Peacock, Stephanie | Wilson, Munira |
| Pennycook, Matthew | Wishart, Pete |
| Perkins, Mr Toby | Yasin, Mohammad |
| Phillips, Jess | Zeichner, Daniel |
| Powell, Lucy | |
| Qaisar, Ms Anum | |
| Qureshi, Yasmin | |

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tonia Antoniazzi and
Gerald Jones

NOES

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Afolami, Bim | Beresford, Sir Paul |
| Afriyie, Adam | Bhatti, Saqib |
| Aiken, Nickie | Blackman, Bob |
| Aldous, Peter | Bottomley, Sir Peter |
| Allan, Lucy (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Mr Marcus Jones</i>) | Bowie, Andrew |
| Anderson, Lee | Bradley, Ben |
| Anderson, Stuart | Brady, Sir Graham |
| Andrew, rh Stuart | Braverman, rh Suella |
| Ansell, Caroline | Brereton, Jack |
| Argar, rh Edward | Bridgen, Andrew |
| Atkins, Victoria | Browne, Anthony |
| Bacon, Gareth | Bruce, Fiona |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Buchan, Felicity |
| Bailey, Shaun | Buck, Ms Karen |
| Baillie, Siobhan | Buckland, rh Sir Robert |
| Baker, Duncan | Burghart, Alex |
| Baker, Mr Steve | Cairns, rh Alun |
| Barclay, rh Steve | Cameron, Dr Lisa |
| Baron, Mr John | Carter, Andy |
| Baynes, Simon | Cartlidge, James |
| Bell, Aaron | Cash, Sir William |
| Benton, Scott | Cates, Miriam |
| | Caulfield, Maria |

Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyins, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan

Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Joy Morrissey and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 7, in clause 3, page 3, line 7, leave out subsection (7).—(Kit Malthouse.)

This amendment would remove the prohibition on the Government specifying Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the Occupied Golan Heights as a country or territory to which the prohibition on boycotts does not apply, meaning they are treated just as all other countries and territories.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 269.

Division No. 354]

[6.2 pm

AYES

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Abrahams, Debbie | Benn, rh Hilary |
| Ali, Rushanara | Betts, Mr Clive |
| Ali, Tahir | Blackman, Kirsty |
| Anderson, Fleur | Blomfield, Paul |
| Ashworth, rh Jonathan | Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben |
| Barker, Paula | Brock, Deidre |
| Begum, Apsana | Brown, Alan |

Brown, Ms Lyn
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Chris
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mather, Keir
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Peacock, Stephanie

Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Sultana, Zarah

Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Sir Desmond Swayne and
 Tonia Antoniazzi

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriye, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William

Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke

Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Gray, James
 Green, rh Damian
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, David
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob

Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura

Tuckwell, Steve
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Scott Mann and
 Joy Morrissey

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 4

RELATED PROHIBITION ON STATEMENTS

Amendment proposed: 28, in clause 4, page 3, line 24, at end insert—

“(4) Nothing in this section requires any act or omission that conflicts with the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Human Rights Act 1998.”—(*Chris Stephens.*)

This amendment would ensure that any act or omission under the “gagging clause” in clause 4 would not conflict with the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA), in particular, Article 10 (right to freedom of expression) and Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the ECHR as incorporated by the HRA.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 197, Noes 275.

Division No. 355]

[6.14 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen

Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mather, Keir
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shanks, Michael
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Strathern, Alistair
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew

Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete

Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gavin Newlands and
Peter Grant

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth

Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren

Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warman, Matt

Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James

Williams, Craig
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Joy Morrissey and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

Bill to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENGLAND)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 20 July, be approved.—(*Robert Largan.*)

Question agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before we come to the next item of business, I have a short announcement to make. Earlier today, in response to a point of order about a BBC story regarding the item of business we are about to deal with, reference was made to Mr Speaker receiving legal advice. In fact, the reference should have been to procedural advice rather than legal advice.

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 150D).

That this House:

(1) takes note of the report of the Independent Expert Panel, The Conduct of Mr Peter Bone MP, HC 1904, and the recommendation for sanction of a suspension from the service of the House for six weeks;

(2) takes note of the subsequent report of the Committee on Standards made on 19 October pursuant to Standing Order No. 150E and agrees with the recommendation that Mr Bone should be suspended from the service of the House for six weeks, to run concurrently with the suspension above; and

(3) accordingly suspends Mr Peter Bone from the service of the House for six weeks, namely from Wednesday 25 October to Tuesday 5 December.—(*Penny Mordaunt.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

DVLA Applications in Post Offices

6.28 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): This is a petition of the residents of the United Kingdom who are concerned that post offices will no longer provide customers with access to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency services. The petitioners say that post offices are vital in accessing DVLA services and provide a service to 6 million people. Senior citizens rely on post offices to renew their licences,

which have to be renewed every three years after the age of 70, and citizens who are unable to use the internet require help and advice from post office staff when completing DVLA applications. The petitioners say that many post offices providing this service may risk closure if customers are not able to renew licences or vehicle tax.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to recognise the importance of DVLA services remaining accessible from post offices, and to renew the contract with Post Office Ltd so that customers have a choice of in- person or online renewal.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Post Offices are vital in accessing in DVLA services per year; notes that the Post Office provides a vital service to 6 million people who use the Post Office network for accessing DVLA services per year; further that senior citizens rely on Post Offices to renew their licences, which have to be renewed every three years after the age of 70; further notes that citizens who are unable to use the internet require help and advice from Post Office staff when completing DVLA applications; further declares that many Post Offices providing this service may risk closure if customers are not able to renew licenses or vehicle tax

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to recognise the importance of DVLA services remaining accessible from Post Offices and to renew the contract with the Post Office Ltd so customers have a choice of in-person and online renewal.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002864]

Development proposals at 21 High Trees Avenue

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I rise to present this petition objecting to the proposed development at 21 High Trees Avenue in my constituency of Bournemouth East. I ask the Government, the Bristol

Planning Inspectorate, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, and the developers to take notice of the size of this petition—over 270 signatures—from local residents who have raised their concerns relating to the inappropriate housing density for the area, the pressure on street parking and the increased risk of local flooding.

I am pleased that this application has already been dismissed both by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and the Planning Inspectorate, but it is still subject to appeal. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government, the council and the Planning Inspectorate to uphold the original decision to refuse planning permission for this development.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the development proposal at 21 High Trees Avenue, Bournemouth under planning application 7-2022-212-10 B did not properly consider residential concerns; notes that the development's height, impact on surface water, appearance, impact on parking and interference with residents was not properly considered during initial planning and at the Planning Inspectorate appeal by the developer.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider the concerns of the petitioners and continue to take into account these concerns if a challenge to the Planning Inspectorate is made within the 6-week window now that the developer's appeal has been rejected.]

[P002868]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I have to inform the House that I understand that the Lords do not insist on their amendment 102B to the Procurement Bill (Lords). I also want to inform the House that I understand that the Lords do not insist on their amendment 22B, and that they have agreed to our amendment 45C in lieu of their amendment 45 with regard to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. Therefore, no further proceedings on those Bills will be necessary.

International Rail Services: Kent

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

6.31 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I am grateful for the chance to bring to the House an issue that is of huge importance not just to my constituents in Ashford, but to many people across the whole county of Kent, and indeed beyond: the withdrawal of the international services, which used to stop at Ashford and Ebbsfleet, but which were stopped when the pandemic meant the temporary end of international travel, and which have not subsequently been restored by Eurostar.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of the successful history of the service, which has been running from Ashford since 1996. It has contributed significantly to economic growth in the area, taking advantage of the geographical proximity to the European mainland to drive economic development, and particularly inward investment. It also, of course, provided a large new leisure market, with people from across Kent having easy access to Disneyland Paris and, at other times of the year, quick journeys to the ski slopes. There is demonstrably huge potential for the Kent stations.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the international trains running from Ashford enhance connectivity, boost tourism, stimulate economic growth, promote cultural exchange and have environmental benefits for the coastal towns across Kent and east Sussex, including beautiful Hastings and Rye?

Damian Green: My hon. Friend is completely right. As she will have heard, I made the point that this is of great interest to people not just across Kent but beyond. Certainly, she is a great champion for Hastings, and I agree that the effects of high-speed rail, in this case international rail, can spread prosperity and the opportunities that travel can bring far and wide from the station.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes the case very well about the opportunities for people in Sussex and the coastal towns, but does he agree that that also applies to people in the north of Kent and the south-east London area, as it is still much quicker for them to access Ashford International for those journeys?

Damian Green: Absolutely. I am glad that my hon. Friend has made that point, because of course travelling into central London for St Pancras is often a real pain for people from the outskirts of London, and certainly for those from the more rural parts of Kent. Access to Ashford, where it is easy to drive, and to get there by train—and it is well connected—makes it much easier to intersect with the international services. I am glad to have his constituents added to mine, and those of other colleagues across Kent, as people who wish for Eurostar to restore the service.

We have been through a minor version of the current impasse before. There was a time in 2007 when Eurostar withdrew the Brussels service from Ashford. A campaign over several years, which I was involved with alongside Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council,

and with the sympathetic support of Ministers in the Government at that time, succeeded in persuading Eurostar that a business-based service allowing a sensibly timed journey from Ashford to Brussels in the morning and back in the evening was viable. That proved so successful that in 2015 a weekend Brussels service was added, as well as a new service to the south of France.

I obviously accept that Eurostar is a private company and makes its own commercial decisions, but the UK Government have a legitimate and important role in influencing those decisions, not least in the specific case of Ashford station. In 2016 Eurostar introduced new rolling stock that demanded a whole new signalling system at Ashford station to allow the new trains to stop there. That was funded at a cost of £8.5 million through the local growth fund. In other words, that was the UK taxpayer spending specifically so that Eurostar could continue to service Ashford. So far the return on that for the taxpayer has been exactly zero. By a terrible irony of timing, the work was completed at exactly the same time as the pandemic struck in the early months of 2020 and international services were suspended, so no train has ever taken advantage of that spending.

I appreciate that £8.5 million does not seem much in the context of the quantum of money that may not have been entirely prudently spent in recent years on the railways, but the point is that this is not a wasteful investment; it is a good investment that, if utilised, would provide services that passengers want, and make better use of the existing railway infrastructure. Having spent that taxpayers' money, it is the Government's responsibility to see that it was well spent. I therefore hope and assume that the Minister will back my call for the Kent services to be resumed.

Eurostar's current position has evolved—not in a helpful direction. In September 2020 it said that no Kent services would stop before 2022. In 2021 it said no services until 2023. In 2022 it said no services until 2025. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) and I have met Eurostar's representatives, and I have met them on a number of occasions with the relevant local authorities. In every one of those meetings I would describe them as perfectly polite but completely obdurate.

Eurostar is of course a commercial company whose contract is not determined by the same kind of franchise or concession model that national services have. Its majority ownership is the French nationalised rail company SNCF, with a small stake for the Belgian state rail company and the other 40% owned by private sector companies. Eurostar has now merged with the Thalys group, and it is undoubtedly true that the pandemic dealt it a very severe financial blow. To survive that blow it took on large amounts of commercial debt that it has to repay. It says that it still has the long-term ambition to grow its services, but that for a variety of reasons it cannot do so at the moment.

There are, however, two reasons that make today's discussion particularly timely, because that low, difficult period identified by Eurostar is coming to an end. The first reason is revealed in its own press release last June about its latest financial results. It says:

"We have turned the page on the Covid crisis and are now moving towards a new chapter of building the new Eurostar group".

Its earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation—EBITDA in the jargon—were a record €332 million. Clearly it is now generating cash because it repaid €127 million of the debt that it incurred during the pandemic. It is now evidently in a position to expand if it wanted to.

The second reason it is timely to be having this discussion in public is the imminent arrival of a competitor to Eurostar in providing international services to the UK; the Evolyn consortium says that it has a billion-pound project to buy an initial 12 trains from Alstom and intends to start services in 2025. At the moment, it, like Eurostar, is planning only capital city services, but the advent of competition means that both companies will have to seek advantages, and the free offer of stations that are already built and raring to go is a potentially great advantage to either of them if they have the gumption to take it.

Obviously, as we have heard in discussions with Eurostar for a long time, stations are useful only if there are passengers who want to use them, and we know that there are. I have heard the argument that anyone in Kent who wants to travel to the continent will travel to St Pancras and start there. However, as we have heard in this debate, that argument does not wash with many people. Apart from the nonsense of having someone catch a fast train to travel 60 miles north-west so that they can get on another fast train that travels south-east under the channel, we have to consider the expense of having to do that. At the margin, some people will be discouraged from that. We know how strong this feeling is because my constituents have organised a petition along the lines of what I am saying this evening. In just a few weeks, more than 36,000 people have signed it and many more are doing so every day. There are clearly tens of thousands of people in Kent, and many thousands more beyond Kent, who would prefer to travel from their local stations, and I think it is incumbent on all of us to make that happen as soon as possible.

In the light of that, I want to ask the Minister a number of specific questions, the first of which is an overarching one: given that Eurostar profits are returning and the Government have put taxpayers' money into the Ashford signalling so that Ashford services can return to 2016 levels, what are the Government doing to support the return of services to the Kent stations? The second relates to an environmental point. There are many studies showing that international rail travel is more sustainable than air travel. Eurostar itself claims that the carbon footprint of one flight is the equivalent of that of 13 Eurostar journeys. As the Government are looking for ways to meet their welcome net zero target by 2050, what are they doing to expand the use of international rail as a more sustainable form of transport, especially as we know that there is significant capacity available, both on the line and on the train paths through the tunnel? There is no capacity constraint in this part of the rail network, so it would be good to use it as much as possible, for the good of the environment.

Sir Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Is it not also the case that much of the electricity used on these trains comes from French nuclear power and so is some of the greenest power available?

Damian Green: Yes, indeed. The rail network in our part of the world has been good at using the power that comes from the interconnector. My right hon. Friend is right

to say that that adds to the greenness of the travel and, in particular, the comparative advantage of international rail travel over international air travel.

My third question is about the new customs arrangements that the EU has devised—and then delayed. I note that the French Government have so much confidence in these arrangements that they have insisted they should not be implemented before the Paris Olympics next summer, but we must expect that the new EES—entry/exit system—will eventually arrive, and Eurostar has argued that the need for more checks, and therefore more staff, is one reason why it cannot yet contemplate reopening Ashford station. So what are the Government doing to make sure that the EES system will not penalise rail travellers?

My fourth question is about the potential new entrant to the market. I appreciate that the proposal is in its early stages, but I assume that if it progresses, the UK Government will need to give some authorisation for it to proceed, and that therefore the Government will need to be in detailed talks with the operator long before any service starts running. Will the Minister agree, in those talks, to put the case for the Kent stations, not least as a way of making the new operation more viable?

My fifth and final question is about the wider issue of cross-channel traffic, which the Minister knows is not only a huge economic positive for east Kent but, far too often, a huge social negative, as blockages at the port of Dover or at the tunnel lead to motorway issues and, at their worst, the gradual coagulation of traffic flows through surprisingly large parts of Kent, some of them quite a long way from the coast. Does the Minister agree that getting more passengers on the train will help to relieve pressure at busy periods on car traffic through the port of Dover and Eurotunnel?

As a final thought, I of course appreciate that not all the levers for the decision are in the Minister's hands, but I know that my constituents, and many others around Kent and the wider south-east, would appreciate knowing that central Government are on their side in the crusade to bring back the international rail services to Kent.

6.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Huw Merriman): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) for securing the debate on this important issue, which is very close to my heart; I am a constituency neighbour to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), who made an intervention, and my right hon. Friend is of course just across the border from me in Kent.

My right hon. Friend has worked tirelessly in campaigning on this matter on behalf of the people of Ashford and the wider Kent area, and I salute him for his work. As I mentioned, as the Member for a constituency that is not too far away from his, I share my right hon. Friend's disappointment that Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations do not currently receive international services. I fully recognise the important benefits that high-speed international rail services provide for the areas and communities they serve, including for people and businesses in Kent and its surrounds. I should state that I was a frequent user of the service, having come across the coastline from East Sussex to Kent, and I would like to be able to do that again.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Some 18 months ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) and I met the chief executive of Eurostar, and to say that it was frustrating is an understatement. It is frankly madness that we have international stations at Ebbsfleet and Ashford but people cannot travel from them internationally. Will my hon. Friend the Minister do all he can, through his Department, to ensure that international services are restored both at Ashford and at Ebbsfleet in my constituency?

Huw Merriman: I can provide my hon. Friend with that assurance. I have a real passion for this subject and am particularly keen to see those international stations become international stations again. I praise my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford for his work on Ashford station, and I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) for his work on behalf of his constituents for the return of Ebbsfleet station. Both Members work incredibly hard and I am keen to see that work rewarded.

High-speed international rail services provide major benefits in terms of the connections they provide and the fact that they are environmentally friendly links to our European neighbours, as my right hon. Friend pointed out. Let me give some context. Before the pandemic, Eurostar was carrying record passenger numbers, with more than 11 million passengers per year, and held a market share of around 80% of journeys between London and each of Paris and Brussels. Given the significant benefits, and recognising that rail is currently a significantly lower-carbon option compared with other modes of transport for international travel, with emissions as much as 80% lower on some routes compared with air equivalents, it is in our interest to ensure the long-term sustainability of the services.

Unfortunately, as we know, the travel industry was severely impacted by covid-19, facing unprecedented challenges, and the sector continues to manage and respond to the impacts of that today. Eurostar passenger numbers collapsed to 5% of 2019 levels for much of the pandemic, and revenue was cut by around 95% for 15 months in 2020-2021. Eurostar therefore made difficult decisions to cut services and consolidate its service offer. That was an entirely commercial decision taken by the operator. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford noted, Eurostar is a non-franchised operator, so it does not receive UK Government subsidies.

During the pandemic, the Government worked very closely with Eurostar—as we did with the travel industry more broadly—to support it in accessing the cross-economy support schemes for which it was eligible. Indeed, I recall that the Transport Committee—when I was wearing my previous hat—leaned strongly into that particular issue and did its best to ensure that Eurostar had that support. That is why I am now looking for Eurostar's support in return, as I wear a different hat.

The Department engaged extensively with Eurostar throughout that period to consider the specific challenges facing the company, but the company ultimately secured financing on commercial terms from its lenders and shareholders. I, too, am very disappointed to see that, despite a strong recovery in demand for travel, Eurostar is yet to reinstate services from Ebbsfleet and Ashford. Since I became rail Minister, I have personally raised

that with Eurostar, making it absolutely clear that I am keen to see those services return as soon as it is possible and commercially viable for the company to do so. I agree with my right hon. Friend that there are some good arguments for why that commercial rationale exists. However, I recognise that it is an entirely commercial decision for Eurostar, given that international services operate on a solely commercial basis.

My right hon. Friend raised the entry and exit system. I recognise that there are challenges at the border, as he noted. The Home Office is the lead Department on that, but my Department is supporting engagement with our European partners and portals, including Eurostar, to help reduce the impacts as much as possible. Indeed, that is another matter that I recall the Transport Committee raising as one of concern with certain dates looming—my right hon. Friend noted that they have been moved. I will certainly make the case for Kent stations when we have those discussions with our European partners, as he asks of me.

I note my right hon. Friend's important point concerning the financial contribution from taxpayers and local partners to ensure that Eurostar's newest trains could serve the station. I recognise his disappointment given the years of work to enhance the station and the unfortunate timing in the light of the pandemic. I back his call for that investment to deliver a return for UK taxpayers. However, thanks to that investment, Ashford remains well placed to accommodate any modern high-speed train that may be used by Eurostar, or any new entrant seeking to compete with Eurostar, in future. On that note, it is important to highlight the prospect of greater competition to Eurostar in the future, which could be beneficial for passengers in Kent, depending on commercial decisions taken by any new entrant. As my right hon. Friend made clear, at least one potential competitor has publicised its ambitions to launch services to directly compete with Eurostar in the coming years.

I have been clear that competition on the railways can deliver real benefits for passengers by providing greater choice and lower prices. It would also be an important step in improving the prospects of services returning to Kent stations. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: there is capacity on that line. I would dearly love to see another operator bringing competition and stopping at those Kent stations. Department officials are engaging regularly with infrastructure managers and European partners to discuss the potential for new services and routes, particularly to address the unique requirements of operating through the channel tunnel. They also stand ready to work with and support potential new entrants through those challenges. Indeed, just today, I was talking about open access and what we can do to bring more competitors on. I will ensure that that is not just domestic: if I have my way, it will be international as well.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford again for raising this important matter in the House. I also recognise the contributions and work of the other Members who have spoken: my hon. Friends the Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) and for Hastings and Rye, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Sir Robert Goodwill). Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford and all those who have spoken, I am keen to see international services return to Kent as soon as possible and when it

is commercially viable. My officials and I will work tirelessly on this matter, and will continue to press for this change in my dealings with our industry partners.

Question put and agreed to.

6.55 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 25 October 2023

[SIOBHAIN McDONAGH *in the Chair*]

Renewable Energy Providers: Planning Considerations

9.30 am

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered planning considerations for renewable energy providers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I am biased, but I think you can never have too many Siobhans in one room. It is great to be here, and I thank everyone for joining us so early on a Wednesday.

This debate really matters to my constituents and local businesses. They are environmentally focused and trying to do the right thing by our planet and for our children and grandchildren, but planning barriers and delays are holding back the renewable potential of the Stroud district and the UK. It is taking years to deliver projects—big projects and little ones alike—and it is not good enough for our constituents, who really want to see progress.

We know that renewable energy sources, as well as critical transmission infrastructure such as grid connections, are vital for the UK to reach net zero by 2050 and decarbonise the power sector by 2035. I have argued for years that technological innovation will provide the solutions that help the UK beat our 2050 target. There are also countless businesses in the Stroud district that show me they will achieve this, because they are leading the way nationally and internationally. It is our businesses that will win the climate battle. It will not be me gluing myself to things or sitting on roads, or getting arrested and stopping people getting to work or going to hospital appointments. I am not going to spend my time being a permanent protester or refusing to recognise where the UK is doing well, just for a political agenda. I want to find practical solutions, and I am going to get things done, using this place in any way I can.

The development of renewables should clearly continue at pace while we transition from oil and gas. The state and local government should protect residents where necessary, but they have to get out of the way wherever possible, and without the taxpayer—all our constituents and everyone in this room—subsidising eco-businesses up the wazoo.

Even in virtue-signalling councils that have declared a climate emergency, planning barriers are causing difficulties for local people. For example, I need clever civil servants and the excellent Minister to help me with issues relating to solar tracking. A local company called Bee Solar Technology contacted me about this many years ago. It is run by a female entrepreneur who, to be frank, gives me a really hard time because she is fed up with some of the problems, but she impresses me every day with her knowledge and desire to make things better for everybody.

Solar tracking systems rotate and follow the sun all day from sunrise to sunset, which enables them to generate more power than static roof or ground-mounted systems. In simple terms, six panels tracking the sun equal approximately 10 panels of static roof system. Fewer panels are needed, and as they are ground-mounted and freestanding, they can be cleaned easily to ensure that we are getting maximum bang for our buck. They can generate direct current electricity from sunlight, even on cloudier days, and people can take the device with them if they move. It works for small homes and big, posh homes, and it can heat a swimming pool, a summer house or a little office at the bottom of the garden.

When we talk about solar, we tend to talk about roof panels, and actually, all the drama is in the massive solar farms, which I will come on to. But people are not well aware of the technology coming through; local planning departments and councils are certainly not. I am not criticising roof panels, as Members will see. I believe they have a vital role to play, particularly against the big solar farms, but everybody I explain solar tracking to thinks it is a really good idea. Indeed, Bee Solar Technology gets lots of inquiries and has won awards, yet it has found that planners do not want to engage or learn properly about new technology, which I think is due to a mixture of being very busy in their jobs, caution and laziness.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The hon. Lady is enlightening us about how solar technology is moving on. On the point about local authorities, I have been approached by the Blackdown Hills Parish Network, a network of councils in my area that represent the Blackdown Hills area of outstanding natural beauty. It suggests that the problem might not be local authority planners but the national planning policy framework that planners have to work in accordance with. Specifically, it fails to give sufficient emphasis to the climate emergency, ecological decline and the principle of leaving the environment in a better state than when we inherited it. Does the hon. Member agree?

Siobhan Baillie: I think this is part of the problem. I love parish councils—they often follow the real detail of planning applications and have battles on a day-to-day basis—but while what the hon. Member proposes sounds very worthy and important, what we want is not statements but the mechanisms. At the moment, we have local authorities blaming the Government and the Government saying local authorities have the power, and local people are caught in the middle. I am happy to work with him to look at the NPPF—we know we are getting a new draft; it has been too slow and we need that information soon—but I want to avoid any more well-meaning rhetoric and get to the bottom of how we get some of these projects over the line. That is really important.

Going back to solar tracking, planning applications are getting rejected. Few people can afford to pay for an expensive planning consultant, and they obviously do not want to engage in local long-standing appeals. The Government planning portal on solar planning regulations makes no reference to solar tracking systems because the technology was not available when the regs were published.

I and Melissa Briggs from Bee Solar have done our best to raise awareness. We have written to endless Ministers and Secretaries of State, from even before

[Siobhan Baillie]

I became the Member of Parliament for Stroud. The current position is as follows:

“The installation of solar panels and equipment on residential buildings and land may be ‘permitted development’ with no need to apply to the Local Planning Authority for planning permission.”

At that point, we think, “Woo-hoo! We can get there”, but then it goes on:

“There are, however, important limits and conditions, detailed on the following pages, which must be met to benefit from these permitted development rights”—

and the list is long. The conditions set out are not too problematic, but the fact that they must all be met could be. I will give some examples. First,

“No part of the installation should be higher than four metres”.

Why? Nobody can explain the 4-metre rule. It seems pretty arbitrary. The Bee solar systems are 4.3 metres when they are at their most vertical, but just under 4 metres for most of the day. What difference does it make if it is in someone’s private garden or business space whether it is 4 metres or 4.3 metres? We have already established that it is an acceptable amenity of the area. I ask the Minister: can the limit be at least 5 metres, or can we have no restriction at all unless there is a serious visual issue?

Secondly,

“The installation should be at least 5m from the boundary of the property”.

Again, why? That precludes people with smaller gardens, narrow gardens and smaller homes from being able to install renewable technology. Should only people with huge personal land be permitted to benefit from renewable technologies? Can that be reduced to 2.5 metres or be at the discretion of councils, depending on the circumstances?

Finally,

“The size of the array should be no more than 9 square metres or 3m wide by 3m deep”.

Why? Where has the 9 metres come from? Solar panels have grown since the legislation was published in 2011. They were about 200 W then and are now about 400 W, and panels of upwards of 500 W are becoming commonplace. Can the requirement be removed or adapted to at least 15 square metres, or is there another way through?

I need the Minister and the Department to answer these questions, because I am banging my head against a brick wall. I want them to look closely at whether local authorities already have the powers—even though some of them do not think that they have them—to grant permission for these things, or whether we need to change the regulations. If so, I will work night and day with the Minister to make that happen.

Although I have highlighted the specific technology of solar tracking, the realities of what I have just explained apply to other issues with renewables. Often the planning systems or the planners and the councils—it sounds as though I am giving local authorities a hard time, but they are at the coalface of local people’s applications and inquiries—do not reflect the up-to-date world that we live in, and planners are blaming the Government, so it goes round in a big circle. Without clarity, local people cannot face battling with planning

authorities and do not have the resources to engage experts. They will give up—and who can blame them, in some circumstances?

I give my thanks to another organisation, the Big Solar Co-Op, and to Maria Ardley, who is a Stroud co-ordinator. She has set out a number of issues that it faces in trying to get solar on to commercial rooftops. I think we can all agree that that is a good thing to do. The BSC is a national community energy organisation aiming to unlock the huge potential of rooftop solar to cut carbon emissions. Its target is to install 100 MW by 2030, which is equivalent to the energy used by about 30,000 homes. The Stroud team has a target of 400 KW of rooftop solar energy in the first year, which is about eight tennis courts’ worth of roof space. However, it is coming up against some big problems that it had not really appreciated would be there, particularly in an area that is so environmentally focused and a council that is so committed to tackling the climate emergency.

There are plenty of large rooftops in our area that could host solar panels. As a non-profit group, the Big Solar Co-Op is pretty attractive to building managers and business owners, because there is no capital cost. The financial and carbon savings to be made are important for head, heart and planet, but as I said, the planning barriers are holding them back. Maria explained to me that a presumption in favour of rooftop solar, as is the case with Kensington and Chelsea Council, would make things easier for BSC in Stroud and nationally. It allows for well-designed, aesthetically responsible arrays to be professionally designed and installed, even on listed buildings. That could make a huge difference.

I also have a lot of time for CPRE as a charity. The Gloucestershire CPRE works incredibly hard to scrutinise planning applications that affect the countryside and nature and will no doubt have a lot to say about the NPPF needing to be updated, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) said. I note that its position in response to wide concerns about solar farms is to reiterate its commitment to rooftop solar policies. Similarly, Heritage England has released guidance on how to install solar in a way that is sensitive and respectful to the building in question and not scaling out listed buildings.

At the moment, the BSC is working on a fabulous building called the Speech House hotel in the Forest of Dean. I have permission to mention that my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and his team have been contacted about this recently, so they will be working through the issues too. Due to the rules on curtilage, the owners of the Speech House hotel and BSC must go through full planning application and hire a planning consultant. That is costly and cannot be done each time by a not-for-profit organisation. If the rules are not changed, BSC may have to rule out listed buildings, when these are exactly the properties that we need to help. Gill, the owner of the Speech House hotel, has said:

“We are particularly keen to reduce our carbon footprint as quickly as possible as well as having the need to reduce our overall energy costs. The hotel uses a great amount of electricity daily to provide the services that our customers need and want. These costs have more than doubled over the last twelve months. As a major employer in the Forest of Dean, not only do we need to be sustainable, but also, we need to be able to control our costs to maintain employment and levels of business.”

This is a sensible, conscientious employer who is struggling to make progress. She has a brilliant organisation in BSC, which is raring to help. However, I am informed that the Forest of Dean planners did not engage or inform BSC about the visit to the property, and it has been unable to discuss the matter with them. It has been reported to me that Stroud and other councils find it difficult to engage with planners.

I would be grateful to hear the Minister's response to the issues raised about applying rooftop solar to commercial buildings and to how issues related to listed buildings could be addressed. Will Ministers replicate what councils such as Kensington and Chelsea Council are doing, or say from the Front Bench whether councils can follow and do this unilaterally right now? That would be helpful, and we could then send that to all councils.

On solar farms—I really appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues on this issue—I represent a rural area, and quite a few constituents have contacted me about the rise of solar farms in the last few years. They are concerned that they are ruining our countryside, with little thought for food security or the future of farming. A meeting with the hard-working Ham and Stone parish council last week brought home the pressures that our small rural villages and communities are under from the development of massive solar farms. Stroud District Council granted permission for a large solar farm at World's End farm against the advice of the parish council and highways.

At a similar time, neighbouring South Gloucestershire Council approved another massive solar farm, which will effectively join up with the other solar farm and create a huge loss of green space. The practical consequence for residents, post-permission, is that they are trying to work out how the delivery of hundreds of solar panels will work; they will have to come down rural country lanes, past a primary school and over a very weak bridge. I have met a few local families who are devastated by this planning decision.

Local people are worried about climate change and care about the environment, but they feel under siege. Arlingham village fought long and hard against a huge solar farm there; long-standing relationships were broken, and there was a very upsetting loss for one family. A local councillor also told me that during the Arlingham case, it was established that Stroud District Council had already met its renewable energy targets, so local people were perplexed about why the Green-led council was approving planning applications that are wrong for small areas.

This issue has become entirely confused and quite worrying. I have a good friend and constituent who runs a business, and I trust him to provide me with sensible, constructive information about solar farms. That business spends a lot of time consulting local people, and if it is going to apply for a solar farm, it will ensure that it works for the local community. He sets out that the total UK land covered by solar panels is 0.1%, and under 0.2% of agricultural land, yet that is not how many of our communities feel. They feel that solar farms are here, and that there will be more coming, but the Government have not quite got on to the issue.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing a debate that is definitely timely. She raises the issue of consultation.

Does she agree that consultation on proposals as far in advance as possible is essential? Local people, whether they are businesses or neighbours, need to understand completely what is coming, so that they can accommodate it where possible. If there is a rising tide of opposition, the applicants need to understand why that is, and try to amend their proposals to take account of any concerns in the area.

Siobhan Baillie: I could not agree with the hon. Gentleman more; he says it far more eloquently than I ever could. Consultation is key, and good businesses, as Low Carbon has been, are getting caught in the mix with others who are riding roughshod over local people, and with situations where consultation is not happening. Also, where big solar farms are coming in, there is no compensation to local areas, unlike in the case of wind and other developments.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's contribution to this debate, but my experience of these things is quite different from hers. As both Minister with responsibility for energy and as a local MP, I did not see friendly, local energy companies that wanted to go to the local community. I saw profit-hungry and greedy big firms that did not give a damn what the local people felt. Let us be frank about these kind of businesses: they are less interested in energy than money.

Siobhan Baillie: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. He is an incredibly experienced local MP with ministerial experience in this field as well. Sadly, our experience on the ground with a lot of applications has been of big applications and big companies not listening to local people. However, I have found a good company and gone through the steps that it takes, and I think it is important for everyone to say that such companies exist. They are the ones that should win out.

A local area is under threat from an application for a potentially huge solar farm, and there would be two tenant farmers in the middle of it. Tenant farms are like gold dust—it is really difficult for any of us to find them for our constituent farmers—yet those farmers will lose their livelihood and home to landowners who could not care a jot about anything. Food security issues are also getting muddled in the mix. I want to highlight what we can achieve by working with good companies, by working sensitively, and by working with communities with solar farms—it is possible to do. It would be remiss of me to be completely down on these things, but I am incredibly worried.

I think that Ministers have said that the rules on solar farms should be changed to protect agricultural land. The Government need to define the protections for land used in food production to make it easier for communities to decide whether a solar farm application is right in the light of the UK's long-term food security issues. I give credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith), who has done an amazing amount of work, and has proposed amendments that I know the Government have looked at carefully, but such changes will need to go hand in hand with changes to planning rules about rooftop solar, or massive farms will always fill the gaps. Will the Minister give us an update on the

[Siobhan Baillie]

issue of solar farms, to reassure local people that even though local planning is erratic, the Government are taking steps to protect agricultural land? What is happening, and when will we feel it on the ground? When will we feel those protections that we say are coming?

Turning to national barriers, I have had some really amazing briefings, and my thanks go to people who are sending them in, including the Conservative Environment Network and RenewableUK. I defer on this to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), who will speak for me on a number of the things that she is concerned about. When it comes to the national grid, we want to see the Government looking more lively. The new Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero said at an Onward conference event that she had 99 problems and they are all the national grid. I know that she is working really hard on it, but again, we need to see the detail.

Before I conclude, I again thank all here for indulging me, as this matters so much to Stroud constituents. I have two tiny little children who cause me chaos before I even get here, so this is a lovely, calm existence for me. I look at my baby and I think about the world she is growing up in, and the desire to ensure that we protect nature and the environment runs really deep. I know that many parents feel the same. I get really angry about all the abuse I get from eco-campaigners who say that I do not care. I do care. I care about this every day, but I make no apologies for taking a practical approach to net zero, as I always have done. I can see that the Prime Minister is trying to do the same thing in the face of great opposition.

I have always picked organisations and local businesses to work with, such as WWT Slimbridge, BorgWarner and PHINIA. I am about to ask about hydrogen combustion engines at Prime Minister's questions. I work with those people to run campaigns that will make a difference, because they are the ones in which I think that I can carry influence. I do that rather than just virtue signalling or shouting into an echo chamber on Twitter. I desperately want to help businesses such as Bee Solar and Big Solar Co-op, who have smart people taking a smart approach to difficult issues.

The Government and local government should remove barriers that do not need to be there. My constituents and I will work on whatever is necessary to make that happen, but as I said, we cannot keep banging our heads against a brick wall. We are answerable to people who come to us saying, "We want these things in our houses, but it is just not happening." I am very pleased to see the Minister who will respond to the debate in his place; he has so much experience from his career. I look forward to hearing what he and all our colleagues have to say.

9.53 am

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms McDonagh. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) on introducing this important subject with such knowledge. She will not be surprised to hear that I too face a lot of abuse online, but for sometimes taking the opposite position. We on the Opposition Benches are concerned that what

the Government call a pragmatic approach to net zero means further delay, which is the one thing we cannot afford.

Net zero should be non-negotiable. At a time when we should be strengthening our climate commitments, it is folly to weaken them. The UK has done well to lead the way on climate change, but recently this Government sadly seem to have given up on the country's leadership position. How unnecessary! Renewables are the cheapest form of energy and would secure our energy supply. Moving rapidly towards renewables is central to reaching net zero by 2050, and will help to limit the devastating impacts of climate change. The Climate Change Committee has said that we are not moving fast enough towards renewables. Offshore and onshore wind development has been slow, and solar is particularly off-track. It is just not good enough.

The proportion of renewable projects being delayed is on the rise. Grid capacity, which the hon. Member for Stroud mentioned, is the obvious issue. However, the planning process must also be improved. My region of the south-west built the UK's first transmission-connected solar farm. Despite its success, the developers said that planning was one of the most significant hurdles to delivering renewable energy at scale. Speeding up the planning process is vital; it takes up to five years to gain approval for an offshore wind farm after the application has been submitted to the planning system. We do not have the time for that in this race to net zero.

Resourcing needs to improve. The Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees do not have enough resources to carry out timely and accurate reviews. It is all well and good saying that there is a debate, and ping-pong about what or who is responsible—is it the national planning framework, or is it local planners? However, if we do not have enough local planners to make these decisions, all these things get desperately delayed. Local government needs more resources and funding to make sure that planning decisions are made in a timely manner; otherwise, there are delayed projects, and delayed progress towards net zero.

The Government must make proper funding available. Local authorities depend on national Government to give them more money, so that the Planning Inspectorate can also do its job. That resource is also missing at national level. That is simply about funding.

Sir John Hayes: On a point of clarity, is the hon. Lady saying that local people should have more say, and local communities should be more empowered, or that they should have less say, and that there should be more direction from the centre? I could not quite understand the point she was making.

Wera Hobhouse: I am happy that the right hon. Gentleman made that intervention, and happy to clarify for him. We Liberal Democrats believe passionately in local decision making, so that is obviously what needs to be strengthened, but local decision making cannot happen if we do not have the resources in our planning departments.

We have also been talking about consultation. I was a councillor for ten years, and was always appalled at how poor consultation was, mainly because councils had statutory obligations to consult only in a very small area. Why do we not widen that out, particularly in

rural areas? If the obligation is just a matter of distance, then 10 people will be consulted, and awareness of big planning applications will spread only through local knowledge, rather than as a result of the council approaching people directly. Why do councils not do that? Because they do not have the money. If they do not have the statutory obligation to consult widely, they will consult only a small number of people. If we want to strengthen local decision making, that must change. I absolutely believe in local decision making, and if a planning decision does become a national decision—if an inspectorate comes in—then, of course, we do not want delays there either, because delays are unacceptable either way. That applies to any planning decision, by the way, not just renewable planning.

The Government must also do more to remove the barriers to renewable energy. Renewables developers still face a planning system that is stacked against onshore wind. It is treated differently from every other energy source or infrastructure project. If that persists, we will not get the new onshore wind investment we need to rapidly cut bills and boost energy security. Onshore wind farms are actually popular: 74% of voters are supportive of onshore wind, and 76% of people would support a renewable energy project in their area. That support holds strong in places that already have an onshore wind farm; 72% of people who live within five miles of one support building more. That addresses a problem that we have: people are anxious about things that they do not know, and a lot of political hay can be made with that, but when people actually have a wind farm development nearby, they support it. That is not surprising: communities benefit massively from onshore wind, both directly—for example, from developers, through bill reductions—and indirectly, through the wider socioeconomic benefits that such investment can bring.

Carbon Brief calculated that the de facto ban on onshore wind cost consumers £5.1 billion last year. That is unforgivable during a cost of living crisis. Planning rules must not block the benefits of renewable energy. The Government must bring the planning rules for onshore wind in England back in line with those for any other type of energy infrastructure, so that it can compete on a level playing field, and so that each application is determined on its own merits.

We Liberal Democrats recognise the importance of community buy-in. We need to win hearts and minds, and to persuade people that renewable projects are good for their communities. Yes, good consultation is part of that; if local communities feel that they have not been properly consulted, they will get their backs up. I absolutely believe in proper consultation. Only with consent from our communities can we deliver the path to net zero. That is why empowering local communities is so vital. More and more power and decision making has been eroded from local government—I can say that, because I was a councillor between 2004 and 2014. We still had a lot of decision-making powers, but they have been eroded in the last 10 years.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says, but when it comes to onshore wind, she must surely acknowledge that consultation often results in opposition. The problem with onshore wind is that too many of the applications

are for areas of outstanding natural beauty or beautiful rural areas, rather than, say, docks or industrial estates. Does the hon. Lady think the focus should be on placing onshore wind farms in more suitable locations?

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the hon. Member for the intervention. A long time ago, when I was a councillor, a big wind farm was built in my ward. I remember well the local objections to it; people said, “Oh, the beautiful, natural environment of our hills!” The natural environment of the hills had been destroyed decades or centuries ago. There were no trees any more. Local people come forward and talk about our beautiful natural environment, but the natural environment had become like that, and wind farms are now becoming part of the landscape that we are creating for people. Once wind farms are there, people stop objecting to them; surveys are very clear on that.

Of course, it is clear that people are always worried about change. We are building something new and taking away something that was there, but if we are doing so for something that is so important, why can we not make the case that a wind turbine might be a much nicer thing to look at than, for example, a coal-fired power station, which we also need to put somewhere if we need energy? What we do as humans creates some disruption to our local environment, and it has done so forever, so what do we want? We need to get to net zero, build this infrastructure and build wind turbines, including in places where we can see them. As responsible politicians, it is up to us to make the case for that. We have no time to waste: it is a race to net zero, and it is difficult. Yes, some people do not like to look at wind farms.

Sir John Hayes: So much for local decision making!

Wera Hobhouse: But this is something of which we can persuade people, and I believe in persuading local people. Yes, that sometimes takes time, but it is for us to do, because we have that persuading power and are in the position of influencing people. That is where we should be, rather than always being on the side of the nay-sayers. That is my honest position. I know that it is not easy; I have been there, too, in my time.

I commend the Liberal Democrats on Bath and North East Somerset Council, which has become the first council in England to adopt an energy-based net zero housing policy. That requires that all new major non-residential buildings must achieve net zero in operational energy. Research from the University of Bath indicates that the policy is likely to establish significant carbon savings in new buildings and reduce energy bills for occupants. Again, did my local council sometimes have difficulty persuading people? Yes, it did, but our local election results show persuasively that where we go out and make the case, we win—even as local councillors. Let us ensure that we persuade people and take them with us. I absolutely believe in that, but I also passionately believe that it is possible to take people with us if we confront people with the alternatives.

Unfortunately, Government funding cuts have forced many local authorities to make sacrifices on climate change policy, as climate change does not come under their statutory duties. That must change. Planning legislation must be bound to our climate change legislation, so that climate change takes greater weight in planning decisions.

[Wera Hobhouse]

A major reason why renewable projects are waiting up to 15 years to connect to the grid is that the planning approval process is not adequately focused on the urgency of delivering net zero. The Royal Town Planning Institute argues that nothing should be planned unless the idea has first been demonstrated to be fit for net zero. The Government should certainly consider the institute's proposals further.

We cannot wait any longer. The UK needs to move further faster towards renewables. Improving the planning system to quicken the building process is an important place to start.

10.6 am

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) on securing this important debate.

I have a specific project that I wish to speak about today. I established and chair the all-party parliamentary group for the Celtic sea, and I have championed floating offshore wind, or FLOW, projects across the Celtic sea, working collaboratively with developers, ports, MPs and associated businesses right around the Devon, Cornwall and south Wales coast. I therefore find myself in a particularly difficult position, as are my constituents, on the proposed White Cross wind farm in my North Devon constituency. This project is 80 MW, so it is only a demonstrator project, and it has secured a distribution-level grid connection at Yelland. Given its scale, it has avoided being a national infrastructure project, and decisions about its development now lie with the Marine Management Organisation, which is under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the local planning authority.

The local community is hugely supportive of FLOW. Although there are some environmental concerns about the six proposed turbines, it is the cable corridor that is proving highly controversial. I have been expressing my concerns about the proposed cable route ever since the project came to light. The route submitted to the planning authority involves tunnelling through several miles of sand dunes, a large seaside car park, holiday chalets, a golf course and possibly a world war two munitions dump, and it will take several years to construct. The quickest route to the plug-in point at Yelland is across Crow Point, a very active sand system and highly designated sand dune complex. Although that route is potentially more environmentally contested, it would cause far less damage to hospitality businesses in a constituency that is dependent on its tourism economy. No one has been able to explain to me who decided on the cable corridor, and both the MMO and the local authority advise that they have no influence and cannot comment on whether a better corridor might exist.

White Cross is owned by Flotation Energy, which has recently been taken over by the Japanese company TEPCO. As somebody in the industry observed last night:

"Their website is a disgrace. There is no contact details for anyone within the company. Just a generic reply section. Very poor and unacceptable. They are taking advantage of the consenting regime because they are under 100 MW. Compared to the work done on other projects it is a joke."

Other developers have fallen over themselves to engage with the APPG, which works cross-party and cross-Government, but not White Cross. I would like to put on the record my wish to meet TEPCO, and for it to explain why it is bulldozing its project through our community.

One of the objectives of the APPG for the Celtic sea has been to co-ordinate a more strategic approach to this new region of offshore renewables, to avoid some of the cable issues seen on the east coast. The APPG's preference throughout has been to establish a single cable corridor to Devon and Cornwall, and one to south Wales, in order to reduce sea floor damage, as well as cabling onshore as the bigger projects go out to sea. The project, which is ready to bid for a contract, will connect to Pembroke, and I know that the cable corridor there has been well managed, and that landowners have been fully consulted. Local landowners are being threatened with compulsory purchase orders, and businesses were not consulted or advised until the planning application was submitted. Councillors are completely at sea when it comes to dealing with this type of planning application.

Additionally, the project is now taking up almost the entire time of one planning officer, in an area where planning is the biggest factor slowing down commercial development and the building of the homes we so desperately need. I hear that the planning department apparently does not have any planning grounds to reject the application. Any support that the Minister's team can provide to the council and councillors on planning would be most welcome.

I have spoken with the MMO and it also does not believe it that it has grounds to reject the application, or the ability to challenge it. It appears that the developer has been able to choose a cable route of their suiting, without any agreement with the local community or the bodies that provide the planning and leasing.

My concerns are multiple. There are only two potential grid plug-ins along the north Devon coast, and these are vital national infrastructure resources at this time—Yelland and Alverdiscott. My understanding is that Yelland is smaller, but I have been unable to speak to National Grid ahead of today to clarify whether the White Cross development will completely utilise the capacity at Yelland. The concern is that it will not.

My view, and that of many in my constituency, is this: if we have to endure this level of disruption to get a cable corridor installed on land, does the development maximise the potential of the Yelland socket? There is growing concern that the developers have chosen a scale that avoids being classed as a national infrastructure project and the scrutiny that would come with it. That may mean that the socket is not optimised.

I have asked White Cross why it could not work with the other projects in the region and consider Alverdiscott for its cable. I was advised that it is too far and therefore too expensive. If a strategic view of cable corridors was taken, the costs might be reduced, but I do not believe that this has even been considered.

I recognise that Alverdiscott has had concerns about the situation it finds itself in as a hub for plugging in huge renewable projects. It is vital that communities that are asked to host this sort of infrastructure are properly compensated. White Cross does not seem to

have offered any community reimbursement, as recommended in the report by the electricity networks commissioner, Nick Winsor.

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech, and I agree with a lot of what she is saying. As she is talking about compensation, will she explain what compensation would be adequate?

Selaine Saxby: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Please do not think that this is a nimby issue. North Devon is home to the Fullabrook wind farm, which, when it was built, was the largest onshore wind farm in the country, at 66 MW. The project established Fullabrook CIC—community interest company—which was set up with £1 million from the then owners of the wind farm. It has now given over £1.58 million for community projects and receives £100,000 per annum from the current owners. I find it bewildering that White Cross has seemingly made no offer of community involvement. Indeed, its only offer is to decimate huge sections of coastline for its own financial gain.

I am gravely concerned that White Cross is not acting in any way appropriately with this development, and is taking advantage of the planning system, which it has chosen to use. I strongly believe that the entire Celtic sea FLOW project should be considered as one national infrastructure project. That would enable proper strategic planning and ensure that we hit our offshore wind targets, and that communities are included in decisions and appropriately recompensed for hosting infrastructure.

It is increasingly possible that the development will undermine all the support for FLOW that has been generated along this coastline. Hundreds of objections have been lodged, and further meetings are planned by local parishes in the coming weeks. It seems that the developers have carte blanche. As someone who is hugely supportive of the renewable opportunities ahead of us—as is my constituency—I ask that steps are taken to find a way through this cross-departmental maze to have this development withdrawn in its current form; that a better plan for the cabling is devised; that the Yelland socket is optimised, if used; and that the community across North Devon are properly consulted and recompensed for hosting this infrastructure.

With energy security so critical, alongside reaching net zero, surely we can devise a better way to install just six wind turbines, so that we can progress more quickly with these crucial infrastructure projects, with community support and transparency.

10.13 am

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) on securing today's debate, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on her speech. There is no doubt that there will be a lot of overlap in our various comments today. She has just spoken very powerfully about the need for local representation and, frankly, how planning blights so much of the agenda for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

I say that in the context of our country having made tremendous progress over the last decade in the transition to more renewable energy. There is a whole new raft of innovation and technology out there, and we are leading

the curve. I also pay tribute to many of our former Energy Ministers who have led what has been quite a taxing issue for the last decade.

As our energy grid is being weaned off fossil fuels, renewable energy accounted for almost 43% of electricity generation in 2020. That represents a very significant increase from 14.6% in 2013 and 2% back in 1991. This country is leading the way, and even in the confines of this debate, I do not think that anyone should overlook what has been achieved. That is welcome, and it is right that we as a nation are moving in the right direction, as well as looking at options for nuclear energy and small-scale nuclear projects, in particular—I say that as a Member of Parliament for the east of England. The Bradwell site is not far from my constituency, and we are looking at all sorts of options there. We should also look at incorporating more efficient energy-saving measures, as well as small-scale solar. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud spoke in a dynamic way about that and the flexibilities needed.

However, with innovation and technology, which we should always encourage and support as a Government through various economic means, we should also look at the planning implications of what all that means, and how it can be practically delivered for our fantastic country. I have many constituents who are deeply frustrated with the planning process, as we all do. I could speak for hours about the planning process, as I have two district councils, one city council, a county council and a town council, as well as various parish councils.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): But, obviously, I hope that the right hon. Member will not.

Priti Patel: Of course, I will contextualise my remarks. The point about the planning process is that when constituents try to do the right thing—my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned this—and want to invest in the right measures for renewables, such as double glazing or renovation works, planning prevents them from doing so, particularly in conservation areas. I have a number of conservation areas in my constituency, where people face bureaucratic hurdles to make such changes and where well-designed uPVC—unplasticised polyvinyl chloride—windows, which are sympathetic to conservation areas, are completely refused because of rigid policies. I have raised that matter with Ministers for a long time, particularly in relation to the focus on infrastructure. There is a clear message that planning policies must adapt when innovation and technology around renewables is adapting. The case is often, “This is good for the environment, but our planning processes are just too rigid.”

Turning to larger infrastructure projects, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon mentioned, the Winsor review into electricity networks was published this summer. It contained a raft of recommendations, many of which were interesting, including those relating to the standardisation of equipment, developing the supply chain and ensuring that the appropriate jobs, skills and training are in place. No one will disagree with any of that; we need it all because we believe in being innovators and pioneers in this space. However, there were also recommendations covering strategic spatial planning and the methods by which locations for infrastructure are determined. That is important, as the

[Priti Patel]

public need to be aware of the full impact of new energy infrastructure, including the locations where it is generated, the infrastructure connecting it to the grid and where the energy is needed for use.

In theory, that is all very nice, because if we apply the benefits in the right way, everyone should benefit. However, the review has caused a lot of concern and anxiety for communities across the country, certainly in the east of England, and I speak about this for many of my colleagues in the east of England—not just in Essex, but in Norfolk and Suffolk. The Minister will be familiar with the “great grid upgrade” plans, as it is now being rebranded, for the new transmission infrastructure between Norwich and Tilbury. The plans will lead to 100 miles of overhead power lines and cables—pylons, in layman’s terms—being erected across the countryside of the east of England, including in my constituency.

National Grid is putting forward those plans because new offshore wind energy is being generated off the east of England. All that was set up nearly 10 years ago, and we are proud of that offshore energy grid—the energy coastline, as we call it in the east of England. It is hugely successful and has attracted billions of pounds in foreign direct investment that has come into that offshore process.

The Government want to connect 50 GW of offshore wind to the grid by 2030, and about 60% of the current offshore wind farms will have the energy that they generate come ashore on the east coast. The sites marked for potential development are heavily marketed to investors by the Crown Estate—we can see exactly where this is going in terms of investment opportunities, and the return on investment that people will get—but with a reliance on the power generated connecting into the Norwich substation. Wind farms are being developed, having received consent, and more wind farms are in the pipeline.

There are so many sensitivities around this issue. I should also point out that, due to commercial sensitivities, there is, frankly, a lack of transparency and openness about what is happening. Local communities have no information about what is being proposed and happening on their doorsteps, and shockingly—this is why local communities and local authorities matter—contracts and agreements between promoters and developers of sites, National Grid and central Government have been kept secret. That is simply not acceptable.

On top of that, contracts for difference have been provided by the Government in many cases—again, there is a lack of transparency, and it is inevitable that residents feel angry about the proposals. This situation has led National Grid to put forward the plans for new pylons that have angered so many across the region. Constituents and campaigners feel their views and objections are being run roughshod over. These are closed deals that have been done behind closed doors, involving central Government, promoters and National Grid.

Constituents and campaigners’ concerns have been compounded by the Winner review’s recommendations on community benefits. Recommendation CB2 states:

“Residents of properties close to new overhead lines should receive a defined direct payment. Communities should receive a set amount of money for new visible infrastructure they host. The benefit should be a defined value per kilometre of overhead line

(OHL) or an appropriate amount for other visible infrastructure. This benefit would only be available for hosting OHL or other visible infrastructure, (e.g., substations).”

What Winner now calls “a defined direct payment” is what my constituents call “a bribe”, which papers over the cracks of unaccountable decision making and the lack of proper consultation. They feel that the current plans will be imposed on them and any bribe provided is an attempt to buy their silence and agreement. Of course, that assumes that the benefits of the defined direct payment process are in place in time to be relevant to the current plans and proposals. They may not be; we just do not know because nothing is transparent.

Communities across the east of England do not want money; they want a genuine say in the future of their community and countryside and a say in what renewable energy could look like, what infrastructure is needed and where it should go. Winner’s recommendation of developing spatial strategies for communities in the east of England is simply too late because the pylons are advancing at a fast pace. National Grid wants to hold its statutory consultation next year. I am afraid that that is simply too late.

I and many colleagues from across the east of England have been working with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to effectively put forward alternative plans. We have been working with the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), and colleagues in the Department not only to air our frustrations and concerns, but to highlight the lack of transparency. We recognise that legal and planning processes are taking place, so the Government’s powers to intervene are limited. Frankly, however, they need to intervene. We want alternative offshore proposals and have even put forward proposals for what that could look like and how the Government could proceed with a proper and transparent consultation. But much of that is falling on deaf ears.

Communities across the east of England are incredibly worried. The plans will simply be badged and presented as riding roughshod over local communities when they and local authorities are powerless in the face of what is being done to them. That will be detrimental to the Government’s whole proposal for increasing renewable energy, to wider proposals relating to infrastructure, and—this could affect the entire country—to wider infrastructure development on energy going forward.

I recognise that the Minister will not know the ins and outs of the Winner review and what is being proposed around Norwich to Tilbury. However, there are alternatives, and the Government need to listen carefully in relation to the planning issues, the lack of consent and the lack of engagement with communities. That speaks to some of the recommendations and points that have been raised in the debate. We need the right kind of focus and we need community engagement.

If I am perfectly honest, in planning departments across the country, it is no longer just about money; it is about skills and capability. We need planners with the right kind of skills and capability who understand how we can future-proof planning policy in this country, so that we get a planning policy that is fit for purpose on infrastructure development, whether that is energy or

transport links. We should think about how we can develop the right capacity and skills, in conjunction with real consultation with local communities.

10.25 am

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): When societies and civilisations lose their sense of the spiritual—their sight of God—the void is filled by causes, which, like the divine, are immense, inspire guilt and are pursued with intolerant zeal. Our cause, rather like the ancient people who danced for the rain or worshipped the sun, is the weather, which is now almost always described as “the climate”. All can be sacrificed, rather like religious fanaticism, in the name of the pursuit of our climate goals. Whether that is the wellbeing of people in London, who face ULEZ and not being able to get to hospital, school or work, or people across our constituencies who will have to replace their gas boilers with air pumps, costing thousands and thousands of pounds that they can ill afford, or whether it is eating up our most precious agricultural land with acres of onshore solar plants—they are not farms; they are industrial structures—all can be defended, as communities are ridden roughshod.

With his typical skill, my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) teased out of the remaining Liberal Democrat in the Chamber, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), the dilemma for those whose zeal is such that they want to impose these things on local communities but dare not say so. The truth is that communities are ridden roughshod because of that zeal. Across the country, a blight is coming. That blight will be pylons in Essex, trunking in Devon and the eating up of tens of thousands of acres of the most precious agricultural land in Lincolnshire. That is unacceptable, communities do not want it and their views should be respected.

Wera Hobhouse: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but what are the alternatives? Does he not recognise that we need to get to net zero by 2050? We need to provide political leadership to take our communities along with us. We are making the case for community energy, for example, which is a wonderful way to take communities with us. Does he not believe that that is our job—that we take communities with us, rather than denying net zero?

Sir John Hayes: Denying “our goal”, “our God”—I believe it is the hon. Lady’s God, certainly. She is right that it is important that what we do in respect of energy, which I spend a great deal more time thinking about than she ever has, needs to reflect a balance. Everyone who understands energy provision knows that renewables can and should be an important part of an energy mix. Yet they are not nirvana for all kinds of reasons—we need the flexibility provided by the kinds of energy provision that can be switched on and off, in a way that solar and wind cannot—but it is vital that we invest in renewable technology.

That is why, for example, I have been a passionate supporter of offshore wind, which is a very effective way of generating energy in a way that does less harm to the environment than onshore wind, which the hon. Lady champions. That essentially means littering the countryside with small numbers of turbines, which are much less productive, much less concentrated and with

countless connections to the grid. That greatly increases transmission and distribution costs, which already represent 15% of every energy bill. It is both economically foolish and environmentally damaging to site wind turbines in presumably thousands of locations across the country, when we can concentrate large numbers of much larger turbines offshore, producing much more energy, with a single point of connection to the grid.

There is a similar situation with solar. I imagine that the hon. Member for Bath will know, as others may, that in Germany a much higher proportion of solar power is located on buildings. In this country, our record is very poor, and I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I would be interested to know what further steps he intends to take to incentivise, indeed oblige, adding solar panels to buildings. Warehouses are springing up all over the country, but I do not see a solar panel on any of them. There are large numbers of industrial sites, commercial sites and all kinds of other places where we could have solar panels.

Selaine Saxby: My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As someone who represents a hugely rural community, I would like to ask this about solar panels. Does he agree that farmers need to be farming, that we face a food security crisis and that we need our land to be productive for food, and that rooftops are indeed the right place to put solar panels?

Sir John Hayes: Absolutely. That brings me to—I do not know whether my hon. Friend anticipated this by a kind of telepathy or just through her wisdom—the next point that I intended to make. Recent worldwide events have taught us of the need for national economic resilience. We are moving to a post-liberal age—thankfully—when we will no longer take the view that we can buy whatever we want from wherever we want and it does not matter how much is produced locally or how far supply lines are extended.

We know that domestic production and manufacture of goods and food is vital for our resilience and security; in order to have that, we need to preserve the best agricultural land to grow the crops that we need. If people were really worried about the environment, they would have thought these things through a little more fully and so understand that shortening supply lines reduces the number of air miles and, indeed, road miles between where food is made and where it is consumed—as we once did—rather than extending supply lines endlessly, with the immense cost to the environment and in every other way. We need more domestic production, but to have more domestic production we must recognise that there should be no industrial solar or wind developments on grade 1, 2 or 3 agricultural land, yet that is exactly what is proposed.

Wera Hobhouse: No one can deny that we need an explosion of rooftop solar panels; we Liberal Democrats absolutely agree. But can the right hon. Gentleman give me an example of where good agricultural land has been used for solar farms? I ask because outside Bath, my constituency, a good solar farm has been built on land that cannot be used for food growing.

Sir John Hayes: Let me give the hon. Lady a precise example. In Lincolnshire, there are currently applications for large-scale solar developments equivalent to 62 Hyde Parks, totalling 9,109 hectares or 1.3% of the total land

[Sir John Hayes]

across the county. She may know that Lincolnshire boasts the highest proportion of grade 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land of any county. These solar plants are proposed on the best growing land in the country. Once that land is lost, it will never be regained. There is this nonsense that the solar panels will be there for only 20 or 30 years. What about the 20 or 30 years while they are, when we cannot grow the crops that we need to survive? This is a preposterous circumstance.

I had a meeting this morning with the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), and I met at the weekend a Minister of State in the same Department. Those Ministers responsible for the environment and agriculture recognise that it is unacceptable to lose this scale of land—the best growing land in the country—because of these developments, largely by businesses that have no connection with the locality whatever and are entirely careless of the impact that this will have on food production and local communities. This rides roughshod over the wishes of local people and local councillors. It is frankly a scandal that we should do that while simultaneously claiming that we want to build more national resilience through food security. Let us make more of what we consume in this country, here in this country; let us reduce our dependence on places far-off of which we know little—and in many cases wish we knew less; and let us have a Government who respect the interests of local communities and defend our land from this blight.

Finally, there is also the sensitive matter of aesthetics. Do we really value the English landscape, or do we not? Is this going to be a green and pleasant for the generations to come, or is it going to be a place full of industrial wind turbines and large-scale solar developments? I know which of those futures I want for my children and grandchildren. Because I know that the Minister is a fine man with a strong sense of the aesthetic, I rather suspect that he sees that future too, but we need urgent policy to make clear to planners and others that we will not simply allow communities to be beleaguered by blight.

10.35 am

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) on her diligence in obtaining this important debate about the nuts and bolts of how our country gets to a low-carbon renewable energy outcome.

I take it that, with the possible exception of one hon. Member present, there is pretty much a consensus that our country needs as much renewable power as possible, both offshore and onshore, so that we are on target for our climate goals. I also take it that we can organise our energy structures so that they mindful of how our landscape and community work while maximising the output of renewable and low-carbon energy in all circumstances. Clearly, decisions will have to be made about where things are sited, how they are sited and what the most productive use of land is under different circumstances, but those will be made within an overall view that we want to move forward on renewable energy as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for Stroud identified the problems in a number of those areas, and I would say there are three: the small print, time, and connections. Those problems stand within the choices that we have to make, and resolving them does not undermine the principle that we must move forward on renewables on the basis of an acceptable use of the landscape, acceptable support from local communities, and an acceptable outcome in terms of the national stock of power and connections. We will have to do a lot of work across the landscape in different ways to ensure that we have not only the renewable plant, but the connections for that renewable plant, the planning arrangements for that renewable plant and all those things that work together strategically to enable us to get the best result for renewable energy across the country.

For example, the hon. Member for Stroud identified a number of things in our planning regulations that quite absurdly stand in the way of perfectly good schemes that everybody wants—the local community and so on. It seems to me that there is an overriding responsibility on Government to get that right. Planning regulations should not impede good schemes that are wanted and agreed just because of the small print. There is therefore a substantial job to be done by Government in actually going through those regulations to ensure that they presume in favour of renewable development wherever possible, with proper concern where there are exceptions, but are not written in such a way as to impede those perfectly good schemes.

By the way, in the most recent alleged amelioration by the Government of the problem of planning for onshore wind, it is claimed that they have pretty much come to terms with the development of onshore wind in their most recently announced changes to planning arrangements. They are no such thing in reality. The small print of those changes still effectively bans onshore wind from moving forward, because of the way that footnote 54, in particular, is to be written in national planning frameworks. Alongside the examples mentioned by the hon. Member for Stroud, that is an example of how the small print can have big effects on stalling, overthrowing or frustrating renewable and low-carbon development. It needs to be removed.

The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) made the point about just how much time is taken on offshore applications. Time is so important in not only getting these arrangements over the line, but ensuring that the investment happens in the first place. Someone faced with a 12-year process of getting their application sorted out, permissioned, thought about and given the go-ahead faces, among other things, a severe gap—a valley of death, as it were—between their application being progressed and the revenue from that application being arrived at. In many instances, those people will simply go away and not develop. Getting the time right, reducing the amount of time that the Secretary of State can take to make decisions and speeding up the process for renewables across the board are of vital importance. That is another thing that the Government can really have a hand in getting right.

The third question is on connections. We have increasing examples of the distortion of decision making on the siting of ground-mounted solar farms, because the developers of solar farms are faced with virtually no connectivity at distribution network operator level as

far as their applications are concerned. They are therefore not necessarily looking for the best site for their solar farm in a particular area; they are looking for the small windows of remaining connectivity that might be possible for their solar farm to develop. They are looking for those permissions before, say, 2035. I have a direct case of that from some people I was talking to recently, who have done exactly that in their application for a solar farm. Unless we can quickly get the connectivity sorted out both offshore and onshore, planning schemes will increasingly be distorted. The Government can do a great deal on that. I hope the Minister will be able to comment on that this morning.

The hon. Member for Stroud has given us a good lesson on the detail and how we need to get the details right to bring the schemes forward.

Siobhan Baillie: I was hoping to hear from the shadow Minister, who is so diligent and always gets in the weeds of the details, which I say with the greatest respect, because he looks very carefully at issues, about his leader's position on planning. The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) says that he will override local views to get planning applications through—I appreciate he was talking about homes rather than renewables—but how does that work with local people's concerns and what he says about issues with councils? There is a lot of confusion out there about Labour's policy, which we know can change with the wind.

Dr Whitehead: I think that what is being referred to is entirely in the context of what I have been saying about the impediments that we have at the moment. It is well known that we have broad support—this has been mentioned in the Chamber today—for particular proposals and a deep, narrow objection among certain people. I am afraid the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) is in that category of people who are just fundamentally opposed to these things, and he has various techniques that he puts forward to underpin that.

Priti Patel: Perhaps I could phrase the question in another way for the hon. Gentleman. His party is the largest party in local government and is in control of the London Government Association right now, where the focus is on net zero. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that there is a disregard in the policies of his party for local communities and that it comes at net zero at all costs? That is effectively the stance that he advocates.

Dr Whitehead: No, I am not saying that at all. Indeed, if right hon. and hon. Members have been following what I have said, they will recognise that what I have said from the beginning is that the role of local communities in assenting to arrangements is vital and should not be eroded, but there is a difference between communities dissenting from various things and one or two people completely holding up something because of their particular positions.

We therefore need to achieve a balance in which the planning system recognises what most of the public want, while ensuring proper rights of consultation and objection, and taking broad support through to the end of the planning system. One reason why onshore wind was banned for a long time in this country was that one person could object to a local scheme under the rules

that were in place from 2015 onwards, and that would effectively turn the whole thing over. That is just wrong. It should not be tolerated in a planning system that should, in principle, be in favour of renewables and low-carbon energy. That is the balance that needs to be struck with these developments, and the Opposition are committed to achieving that.

I hope the Minister will take from today's debate that there is a lot of work for Government to do on getting the planning arrangements right for the development of renewable energy and on getting the development right, in terms of the proper arrangements that should exist for local consultation, reputation and possibly compensation. For example—

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Order.

Dr Whitehead: I am happy to bring my remarks to a close, Ms McDonagh, which I anticipate is what you are going to suggest.

Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Thank you.

Dr Whitehead: I just want to briefly mention the great work that the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) is doing on the Celtic sea. I think she will agree that we must get the offshore planning right for those developments so that landing can be assessed in terms of a planned arrangement at the start of that process, as it should increasingly be for the North sea, and so that the issues that she raised do not fall outside planning arrangements. That is another thing that the Government can get right; I hope the Minister was listening to the hon. Member for North Devon about how, among other things, they should go forward with the Celtic sea.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): It is a great pleasure to respond to this debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for securing the debate. I am short of time, so although I hope to answer most of the points that she raised, I am happy to get back to her at a later stage if I have not done so. I also thank the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) and my right hon. Friends the Members for Witham (Priti Patel) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for their contributions.

I want to assure everyone that sustainability remains at the heart of this Government's ambition for development, and that that includes the protection of the environment and local communities. Energy security and protecting our environment are just some of the key challenges we face in the UK. Meeting those goals is urgent and of critical importance to the country, and we believe that they can be achieved together for the UK.

We believe that renewable energy will play a key role in helping to secure greater energy independence while building a more sustainable and greener future for generations to come. However, the Government recognise that, as with any new infrastructure, there will be local impacts. It is therefore essential that we have a robust planning system that not only helps to deliver energy

[Jacob Young]

security, but protects the environment and local communities and supports the Government's wider ambitions on net zero.

The dramatic rise in global energy prices following the covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has emphasised the urgency of the need to build a strong home-grown renewable sector. Energy security is therefore one of the Government's greatest priorities. As the British energy security strategy sets out, there is a growing need to diversify our energy sector by growing our nuclear sector, increasing our capacity for renewables across solar, onshore wind and offshore wind, and exploring how hydrogen can be incorporated into the domestic energy supply mix.

Our "Powering Up Britain" policy paper, which was launched in March this year, made clear how important the planning system is to delivering the Government's commitments on energy security, net zero and energy prices. We need lots of new low-carbon infrastructure, including generation, network connections and storage, as we have heard today. Our national planning policy framework makes it clear that local planning authorities should have a positive strategy in place to promote energy from renewable and low-carbon sources. Last month, we updated the framework in relation to onshore wind. These changes are designed to make it easier and quicker for local planning authorities to consider and, where appropriate, to approve onshore wind projects where there is local support.

Sir John Hayes: Will the Minister give way?

Jacob Young: I will come to the points that my right hon. Friend made in just a moment.

For nationally significant infrastructure projects, the average time for development consent order applications to be decided increased by 65% between 2012 and 2021, and demand on the system is only increasing. We are therefore bringing forward reforms, as set out in the NSIP action plan, to speed up the process for users of the NSIP planning system, to grow our economy, achieve our environmental and net zero goals and level up jobs and opportunities for local communities.

Martin Vickers: Will the Minister give way?

Jacob Young: I am sorry, but I am very tight for time and I want to come to some of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned.

I turn to community engagement. Early engagement between developers and communities is essential to understanding the impacts of energy development in local areas and to securing appropriate mitigation where impacts cannot be avoided. It is key to securing benefits from projects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned solar farms. The Government recognise the need to preserve our most productive farmland, as far as possible. The Government seek large-scale ground-mounted solar deployment across mainly brownfield, industrial and low and medium-grade agricultural land. Where significant development on agricultural land is shown to be necessary, the NPPF sets out that areas of poor land quality should be used in preference to those of higher quality.

It is proposed that any use of land that falls under Natural England's BMV—best and most versatile—agricultural land classification will need to be justified during the consideration of a planning application.

Sir John Hayes: Can the Minister say that grade 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land will not be appropriate, and that that will be in the policy? Furthermore, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) gave me a commitment on wind that topography will be a factor and that wind cannot be sited in areas that will have a disproportionate impact on the landscape.

Jacob Young: I hope to come on to my right hon. Friend's second point. On agricultural land, the BMV classification covers land in grades 1, 2 and 3a, but not 3b.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham for her comments on the plans between Norwich and Tilbury. I am unable to comment on the case directly, but I know that she has met numerous Ministers. She is a brilliant campaigner and champion for her constituents in Essex. If she is struggling to get further meetings, I will help to arrange them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned rooftop solar. We have recently consulted on changes to permitted development rights for both domestic and non-domestic ground and rooftop solar; further details will be announced in due course. I note her questions and points about solar tracking, and the clarity that she has provided. She is well informed—I certainly was not aware of some of the challenges. At this stage, I am not aware of planned changes to solar tracking, but I will ask the planning Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud and to hear the case in respect of companies such as Bee Solar and how the rules could evolve with the technology.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon for her work in establishing the all-party parliamentary group for the Celtic sea. I cannot give her the assurance that she seeks today, but I will ask my officials to meet her and her councillors to discuss what she has mentioned and help them to assess the energy system in local plans.

On the points made about planning resourcing, the reason why the planning Minister is not here today is that she is upstairs in a Committee on a statutory instrument that will increase planning fees by 35% for major applications and 25% in other cases. I hope that that goes some way to addressing the points made by the hon. Member for Bath.

I thank hon. Members again; I hope I have left enough time for my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud to respond.

10.58 am

Siobhan Baillie: I thank everybody for their contributions. In the examples of local projects in North Devon, Cornwall, Essex and Lincolnshire, the scale of things to do will make the Minister's hair stand on end, but I am also very clear that this does not all lie at the Government's door; local authorities can play a huge role in delivering these projects, being more transparent, responding to constituents and being the front door to getting things

done. With the confusion that is reigning, we need some clarity and it probably needs to come from the Government and from people like the LGA. I thank everyone again and I thank you for your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered planning considerations for renewable energy providers.

World Arthritis Day

11 am

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered World Arthritis Day.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. This House was in recess on 12 October, but that date has been celebrated—if that is the right word—as World Arthritis Day since it was established by Arthritis and Rheumatism International in 1996. Its aim is to raise awareness across the world of the existence and impact of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases, and to educate people about symptoms, preventive measures and treatment options. I thought it might be helpful to bring this debate to the Chamber today—the closest date to World Arthritis Day that we could arrange—to raise awareness, to highlight the extent and impact of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in Britain today and to continue the debate on what we can do to mitigate the impact of arthritis.

What is arthritis? Arthritis refers to painful, stiff or restricted joints, which are common symptoms in conditions that cause joint damage or inflammation. They include osteoarthritis, which happens when the body can no longer maintain and repair one or more joints; autoimmune inflammatory arthritis conditions, including axial spondyloarthritis; crystal arthritis such as gout; or symptoms of inflammatory connective tissue diseases, such as lupus. Arthritis is used as an umbrella term for a range of conditions, and that is how I will use it in this debate, although there are certain issues specific to particular conditions that I will mention later.

The subject is worthy of debate for three reasons: first, to recognise the inherent issues in living with arthritis, and how widespread it is; secondly, to highlight the wait for diagnosis and treatment; and thirdly, to understand the economic costs of not dealing with musculoskeletal conditions effectively. We might think that arthritis only affects old ladies, but it is more widespread than that. More than 10 million people in the UK—one in six of our constituents—have arthritis. One in six of our constituents is in pain and experiences fatigue and often restricted mobility.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this debate. In Northern Ireland, where we have a population of 1.95 million, there are 525,000 people living with arthritis or another musculoskeletal condition. That gives some perspective—it is more than one in four. The scale of the issue is massive.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that for those in the early stages, help in dealing with pain and strengthening the muscles can prevent further untimely deterioration? We should ensure that people stop classifying arthritis as an old person's disease, so we can allow younger people to determine what they have and how to manage the progression that the hon. Gentleman wishes to achieve.

Tom Randall: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. When we have debated this subject in the past, he has raised the issue of arthritis in Northern Ireland; I am so pleased to see him raising it again. He is right in the

[Tom Randall]

perspective that he takes on the breadth of the issue, which affects a wide variety of people. I will come on to that point shortly.

One of my Gedling constituents puts it this way:

“Living with arthritis changes you and turns your world upside down. Things you took for granted become obstacles and daily challenges to be overcome. On a good day, you might not look like you’re living with a chronic condition but it never goes away. It’s hard to plan ahead because you don’t know if you’ll be up to going out or meeting up. Arthritis doesn’t only affect the person with the condition but their family too. I have watched Rheumatoid arthritis rob my mum of a life and now I have it too. It makes me frightened for my daughter’s future.”

Early diagnosis and prompt treatment can improve the futures of people living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, but not always. In the case of axial spondyloarthritis, in which I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on axial spondyloarthritis, a key challenge remains timely diagnosis. In this country, the condition currently takes an average of eight and a half years to diagnose, which puts us behind most comparable nations in Europe.

The latest report of the national early inflammatory arthritis audit, which is run by the British Society for Rheumatology, found that patients are experiencing diagnostic and treatment delays, with 44% of patients still not referred within the target of three working days and 48% of patients experiencing symptoms for longer than six months prior to referral. Although the average time to treatment has improved in England, having been reduced by three days, delays are an average of 12 days higher than the quality standard of 42 days.

The impact of arthritis is ultimately a human story, but the economic cost is also worth mentioning. According to the Office for National Statistics, 23.3 million working days were lost in 2021 due to musculoskeletal conditions. I have thought about how to put that figure in a way that politicians and politicians can understand. Think back to the winter of discontent in 1979, when 29 million working days were lost due to strike action. That was a politically pivotal year, which was notorious for how many working days were lost, and we are facing the equivalent of 80% of that figure—not just in one year but every year because of musculoskeletal conditions.

People with arthritis are 20% less likely to be in work than people without arthritis. Twelve per cent of sickness absence in the NHS between September 2021 and August 2022 was due to back problems and other MSK conditions. The National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society estimates that

“A patient aged 26 who waits 8.5 years for a diagnosis is likely to lose around £187,000”,

the majority of which derives from a loss of productivity due to reduced employment. The average patient also incurs costs of around £61,000 in out-of-pocket expenses while waiting for a diagnosis. That includes the cost of medication, travelling to appointments and private healthcare appointments, including visits to chiropractors.

I first praise the Government for making musculoskeletal conditions part of the major conditions strategy. Making MSK one of the six major conditions signals the importance of this issue, and I believe that it demonstrates that the Government are serious about tackling it. I hope that it will be understood that there are a range of measures

that can be taken to improve matters. The Government have made reducing waiting lists one of their top priorities to improve the lives of those with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, including those waiting for joint replacement surgery, but I would welcome clarification that it will remain a key Government priority and clarity on how that will remain the case in the face of likely future winter pressures.

According to the British Society for Rheumatology, growing the rheumatology workforce would reduce the health and societal costs of newly diagnosed rheumatoid arthritis by £50 million, so I welcome clarification from the Minister on plans to grow the rheumatology workforce.

Everyone recognises the valuable role that primary care can play. Raised public awareness can help to encourage early presentation in primary care, but there is also work to be done to help GPs and other healthcare professionals to recognise conditions. I spoke earlier of the delay to the diagnosis of axial spondyloarthritis. Fifty-six per cent. of that delay time occurs in primary care, with GPs often failing to identify the symptoms of axial spondyloarthritis and thinking that the patient may have mechanical back pain or back pain associated with injury. That can lead to repeated primary care visits and causes patients to be bounced around in the system, placing further burdens on the already stretched system. I welcome any opportunity to follow up with the Minister separately on that point, particularly on what can be done to improve public and primary care awareness of these conditions.

World arthritis day only comes once a year, but for those living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions it is a constant issue. While they might dream of a world free of pain and discomfort, that is not yet a reality. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue on the Floor of the House today and I look forward to hearing further contributions on how we might make that the case.

11.10 am

The Minister for Health and Secondary Care (Will Quince): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McDonagh. Let me first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) on securing a debate on this hugely important issue. I know that he is a tireless campaigner for those living with arthritis, in particular axial spondyloarthritis, and his experience is invaluable in bringing a voice from that community to this place. He made a very emotive and powerful case in his usual articulate and eloquent way. I would also like to thank him for sharing his constituent Elizabeth’s experience, which shows how much further we still have to go in supporting people with this condition.

I would also like to pay tribute to the outstanding charities that support the 10 million people living with arthritis in the UK. I know that my hon. Friend works closely with the National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society—the NASS—and many other charities, such as Versus Arthritis and the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society, which do such fantastic work to support patients and drive improvements in care. He referenced arthritis week—those charities have collectively made arthritis week a resounding success and do stellar work raising awareness not just during that week, but all year round, as my hon. Friend rightly pointed out.

My hon. Friend is also absolutely right to point to the impact that arthritis has on not only people suffering from the condition, but their families and carers. I know from my own experience of growing up with my grandmother, who lived with rheumatoid arthritis, the impact it had not only on her, but on my mother and the wider family. He is also right to highlight the difference that early diagnosis, the quality of care and proper support can make. He raised a number of important points in this debate; I will turn to each one now.

My hon. Friend made a hugely important point about early diagnosis of the condition and set out some of the challenges. He is right to stress the difference that early diagnosis can make to long-term quality of life. Research from charities shows that one year, rather than eight years, to diagnose inflammatory arthritis can save individuals over £150,000 in lost income and medical expenses. I know that NHS England is working hard to improve early diagnosis rates through its GIRFT—getting it right first time—rheumatology programme, which is designed to improve the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients, but I appreciate and recognise that we have further to go on this. I would be very happy to work with my hon. Friend to see what further improvements we can make alongside NHS England.

In terms of treatments for arthritis, the Government are committed to supporting timely and, vitally, consistent access to effective new medicines for NHS patients with arthritis. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has recently recommended several new medicines for arthritis and other rheumatological conditions, including Rinvoq, Tremfya and Skyrizi. These allow patients to benefit from pain reduction and an improved quality of life and are now, I understand, routinely available for clinicians to prescribe to eligible NHS patients in line with NICE recommendations.

My hon. Friend was generous in setting out details about the major conditions strategy, and I agree with so much of what he said. In January of this year, we announced our plan to publish the major conditions strategy, which is designed to tackle the key drivers of ill health in England. We have now published our initial report, “Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework”, which sets out our plan to promote prevention of non-pharmaceutical interventions. The idea is to create a truly personalised approach for patients. I can assure my hon. Friend that my firm commitment is to continue engaging with charities such as Versus Arthritis and the NASS as we develop that strategy going forward. That is absolutely right; in fact, it is critical that we work with those charities to ensure that we are getting it right as we develop the strategy.

I would also like to touch on gene and cell therapies. In my view, having looked into this not just in relation to arthritis but more broadly, they have huge potential. I am passionate about the UK’s status as a life sciences superpower, and I am really pleased that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has launched the innovative licensing and access pathway to reduce the time it takes to get innovative medicines to market. In April of this year, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommended Upstaza for aromatic L-amino acid decarboxylase deficiency, which is a horrific genetic disorder affecting children. That is the first gene

therapy for children with that condition, which is administered directly into the brain through a minimally invasive procedure.

My hon. Friend touched on elective recovery, and he is right to do so, because we know the size of the waiting list and the impact that has on patients. He rightly raised the waiting times for operations that patients often need, such as joint replacements. Of course, alongside that, it will not have escaped his notice that cutting wait lists is one of the Prime Minister’s five priorities. That is why we are putting record staffing numbers and record levels of funding into our health service. We are spending over £8 billion from 2020 to 2025, plus an additional £5.9 billion specifically for capital projects: funding for new beds; new tech and equipment; community diagnostic centres; and surgical hubs. We have virtually eliminated 18-month waits, and from this month patients waiting over 40 weeks will be informed of their right to be treated somewhere with a shorter waiting list—which of course includes those with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. Patient choice is going to be at the heart of that.

My hon. Friend and I have previously had conversations about prescriptions—particularly free prescriptions—the charges for people with arthritis, and the need to review the current medical exemption list. I believe there has been only one addition to the list since 1968, which was specifically for cancer. I apologise for what may be a disappointing response, but we do not have any plans to make another exemption at this time. However, I would say to my hon. Friend and all those raising this issue that around 89% of prescription items are currently dispensed free of charge, and there are already a wide range of exemptions from prescription charges for those who meet the eligibility criteria.

My hon. Friend has also raised the issue of mental health with me in the past, and we know that about 30% of people with rheumatoid arthritis develop depression within five years of their diagnosis, and that 20% of people with osteoarthritis experience depression or anxiety. Of course, those statistics should concern us. That is why we have made it centrally clear to commissioners at the local level that we expect NHS talking therapies to be integrated into physical healthcare pathways. It is absolutely critical that, alongside their physical health, we also support the mental health of patients. Our NHS long-term plan commits to an additional £2.3 billion a year for the expansion of mental health services by 2024, so that an additional 2 million people can access NHS-funded mental health support.

I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured by some of the measures that I have outlined today. I recognise that we have to go further, and my hon. Friend made a powerful case for that. To respond to his request for me to work with him, alongside NHS England, to explore how we can do that, my door is of course always open to him and other colleagues on this issue. I would like to thank him again for giving me the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the very highest standards of care for the 10 million people living with arthritis in this country. I will of course look at what more can be done to address the needs of those affected by arthritis. I will take his points away and give them further thought, so that together we can continue to create the kind of care that patients deserve, to allow them to live their lives to the fullest. I would like to close by again

[Will Quince]

thanking my hon. Friend and the charities for all their work in keeping a spotlight on this issue so that arthritis awareness remains constant in the public eye, not just for one week but every day of the year.

Question put and agreed to.

11.20 am

Sitting suspended.

Future of Horseracing

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Ind): I beg to move, That this House has considered the future of horseracing.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and to open this debate on the future of horseracing. As we can see by the sheer number of colleagues who have made the time to come today, it is an issue that affects the whole country, and there is a great deal that we need to do to secure the future of horseracing. That is why I was motivated to call this debate.

We all know that British horseracing is essential to this country's culture, to our language and many of the idioms that we use, to our heritage, and of course to our economy. It means a huge amount to many, many people. Horseracing is the UK's second-largest sport, in terms of those who watch it and those who go. It provides great joy and excitement. There are 5 million race-goers annually, with almost 100,000 jobs and more than £4 billion-worth of economic activity in the industry. That ultimately means jobs and pay for those who are employed in horseracing. For those on the Treasury Bench, there is more than £300 million in taxation, which I am sure would not go amiss.

There is also a global significance. British horseracing is the pre-eminent horseracing industry in the world, but it is also under significant challenge. Modern technology has improved British horseracing enormously, but ultimately it is the most ancient of sports. As with many other successful things, many places claim to be the first in the world to have horseracing: some in the Gulf, some in the downs of southern England, and also near Chester, where I grew up—there is a case for saying that the first known horserace, or at least the first on which there was betting, was held near Eaton. Of course, betting is integral to the sport of horseracing—I will come to that in a moment.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentions history, but we believe we have had racing since 1800 in Market Rasen, in my constituency. It depends crucially on betting. Lincolnshire people are sound, sensible and prudent people. The whole future of smaller racecourses such as Rasen is now being put in jeopardy by these affordability tests on betting. I hope my right hon. Friend will give a really powerful speech defending the industry.

Matt Hancock: I certainly intend to. My right hon. Friend will be the judge of whether I manage to give a powerful speech, but there is certainly a very powerful case for saying that there is a really serious policy error going on that we need to fix. It is having a really serious impact, especially on the mid-size and smaller racecourses.

I am lucky enough to represent Newmarket, in my West Suffolk constituency, which is home to two of the finest—in fact, the two finest—racecourses in the country. It is the global headquarters of flat racing, and it has grown over the 12 years that I have represented it. It is an incredibly important sport for the whole town, with more than 7,000 people in and around Newmarket employed directly and indirectly in horseracing. It generates over £250 million in my constituency, and obviously attracts thousands of others, positively impacting and supporting local businesses, the hospitality trade and

the like. It is also integral to the town. The horses walk through town every morning on the way from the stables to the gallops. As my right hon. Friend suggests, I will speak about the problems that affordability checks have brought.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Of course, Stratford-on-Avon racecourse is one such racecourse that has been adversely impacted. I would really welcome the Minister being cognisant of the fact that there is a problem here, when his Department and the Gambling Commission seem to be peddling what I would only describe as drivel about affordability checks being frictionless or racing not being damaged. Clearly, there is damage being done. On the point about how we support racing globally, there is a straightforward lever that we can pull now on the overseas element of the levy—on bets placed here on overseas racing. It is a no-brainer that we should get that done. I think the right hon. Member promised it back in 2018, and it should happen now.

Matt Hancock: I feel very strongly about this subject, not only because I represent Newmarket but because I had the joy of riding in races at Newmarket. I was the first MP in modern times to win a horserace at Newmarket in 2012. Since then, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who has been an incredible advocate for horseracing and does jumps, which are much harder, has also ridden winners. He always sends me a photograph of him at the winning post. The Minister should note that the fact that another Minister has turned up to support this debate, even though he cannot speak—[*Interruption*]*—although he can cough—*shows the strength of feeling on this issue.

I feel incredibly strongly about this; it is personal to me. It is personal to me for two reasons. First, I represent Newmarket and love the sport; and secondly, I have personally participated. I underwent a weight-loss programme almost as exaggerated as that of the former Chancellor, who has just spoken, my right hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), in order to do that.

Three things need to happen. The first is the levy reform that I promised as Culture Secretary in 2018.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Before the right hon. Gentleman moves on to the detailed point, there is a slight danger that the debate is becoming very internalised to racing, racing towns and the immediate racing industry. We also ought to acknowledge that this is one of the big attractors to the UK in a broader sense, in the same way as our cultural offer, other sporting events and architecture are. It is part of the whole scene that makes us attractive for inward investment and inward workers. Is it not important for our country, to attract investment and people, to have that broad range?

Matt Hancock: I totally agree and could not have put it better myself. That shows the cross-party nature of the work needed to ensure that racing has a bright future, for the reasons the right hon. Gentleman set out and those that I have set out. I completely agree with every word he has said.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. He said he would outline three reasons why this is important. Can I add a fourth one? With the costs of stabling and

even learning to ride escalating, does he agree that there is a danger that the sport will soon be enjoyed only by the elite? Does he agree that steps should be taken to ensure that people of all classes should have access to the sport and the opportunity to take part? In my constituency, we have that. I hope we can agree that as well in this debate.

Matt Hancock: I could not agree more. The hon. Gentleman's intervention shows that this is an issue for the whole United Kingdom, and for people of all backgrounds across the country. In my constituency, I have Heads of State rubbing alongside those from every background who love horseracing. It brings people together, and we should celebrate that. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point.

These are the three issues I want to raise with the Minister. The first is levy reform, which was promised. Critically, although we legislated a decade ago that anyone betting on a horserace through an offshore platform counts for the levy, we should also say that anyone betting on an offshore race counts for the levy. Otherwise, people will be increasingly driven to betting on races that happen overseas, and the international problem is significant. Prize money, which entices people to put horses into GB races, at an average of £16,000 per race, is lower than in Ireland, at £22,000, and France, at £24,000. That is not sustainable.

Levy reform is critical, and it is vital that the horseracing and gambling industries come together, shepherded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and bring forward a strong, credible proposal. I say to those who are in and support the gambling industry that they need people to bet on races—that is, real betting, on unknown outcomes, as opposed to computerised betting on a smartphone, where everybody knows they will lose money if they keep going. Horserace betting is a joy and a pleasure for millions. It is the best way to defend gambling, and supporting the horseracing industry is massively in the interests of the gambling industry.

The second issue, which deeply affects my constituents, is the importance of ensuring that some of the necessary occupations for horseracing are on the Migration Advisory Committee's shortage occupations list. I have written to the Home Office about this issue and they said, "Speak to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport." The DCMS Minister is here today, so this seems an opportune time to raise the issue.

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): I thank the right hon. Member for securing this important debate. My constituency, Somerton and Frome, contains Wincanton racecourse, alongside many successful training yards and stud farms—including Paul Nicholls Racing and Joe Tizzard Racing. The industry plays an important role, but it is facing a shortage of workers due to our rural location. As the right hon. Member has said, the Migration Advisory Committee has recommended six horseracing roles to be added to the shortage occupation list, but we are waiting for approval from the Home Secretary. I am sad to see that horseracing has become yet another industry paralysed by these inflexible immigration rules. Does the right hon. Member agree that the Home Secretary should urgently approve these recommendations and help British sport?

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Order. That was a very long intervention.

Matt Hancock: I agree that the Home Secretary should sign off on the Migration Advisory Committee's recommendations; they are based on analysis and fact. If she signs off on them, it shows the system actually working rather than not working. The Migration Advisory Committee has agreed that there is a problem and it is proposing to fix it—and fix it we must.

John Spellar: What assurance has the right hon. Gentleman received from the racing industry as to what training programmes they have got going into the future, when they will not need this to be a permanent feature?

Matt Hancock: There are significant training programmes already in place in the horseracing industry—for instance, at the British Racing School in my constituency, another British Racing School in Doncaster, and apprenticeship programmes right across the industry. In fact, horseracing is brilliant at taking youngsters, who might not have succeeded in mainstream education, and giving them a wonderful, different career—I know this as a great supporter of those with dyslexia. Horseracing is really good at that and good at the training, but that is not enough; we need to make sure we can hire people from overseas as well.

My third and most important point for the Minister is that the recent gambling review set out to the Gambling Commission the need to ensure that gambling is affordable. Nobody speaks more strongly about the need to control problem gambling than me. As the Secretary of State for DCMS, I brought in the reforms to fixed odds betting terminals, which effectively got their scourge off our high streets. As the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, I expanded the gambling clinics to ensure that there is direct NHS provision for gambling addiction, which is a very serious problem. However, the way that the Gambling Commission is bringing in these so-called affordability checks makes people move from gambling on reputable platforms into unregulated gambling. That is therefore having the directly opposite effect to the intention.

I understand the intention to tackle problem gambling; I have long supported that goal. The problem here is that, in order to tackle the problem of online games designed to hook people in with an adrenalin rush—and give them a certain loss—instead, those who love to have a flutter at the bookies, online, or at the racecourse are being caught in this net. Many people have already closed their betting accounts because they refuse to give highly personal data to the Gambling Commission—and frankly, I can understand why they have done that. This is already happening. It is happening before the Minister has set out his view. It is happening in response to the White Paper, not to Government policy. It is ultra vires from the Gambling Commission—it is getting this wrong and damaging the very objectives it set out to achieve. The Minister can already act on this by simply setting out that the current way that the affordability checks programme is being put in place is counterproductive. If Members want proof of that, I will give them it.

Research by PwC found that the number of customers using unlicensed betting websites more than doubled in one year, from 210,000 in 2019 to 460,000 in 2020.

Billions of pounds are now staked on unlicensed betting websites, which do not have support programmes or any identification of people who might have suddenly lost a large amount of money or who display erratic behaviour. They do not contribute to horseracing in the way that they need to, nor do they offer support for problem gambling. This policy has been a mistake, and the Minister needs to change it.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): The right hon. Member talks about illegal betting, and a lot of that comes through the use of illegal drones to film races in the first place, which means that the racecourses do not get any revenue. We need to make sure that there is integrity in the filming of sporting events, so that the revenue goes to the right places. The technology is moving on, and there is illegal use of data through the tools he talked about earlier. We must stop illegal drones and betting sites, and make sure that the revenue is going to the right places.

Matt Hancock: I totally agree. That point is another problem that needs to be addressed, and my hon. Friend is right to raise it. All these problems drive down the amount of money going into horseracing, which has two consequences. One is that there is less prize money, which means that there are fewer horses coming forward and that the UK will lose its pre-eminent position, as well as the tax revenues, jobs and prestige that comes with it. For instance, in 2022, the average number of horses competing in a race was at its lowest since records began in 1995. There is a problem that needs to be fixed.

The second consequence is that there is less money for problem gambling programmes, which we know are needed to help the minority of people who have a problem and need support. This is not only ultra vires from the Gambling Commission, but counterproductive to the goals of those who, like me, care about supporting people who have a gambling addiction. The websites to which people are being driven do nothing to promote safer gambling, do not support sports and do not make any contributions to tax, and the intrusive affordability checks happening right now—let alone what might be threatened in the future—are reducing betting turnover. They are impacting on horseracing and on people's ability to have a flutter on the horses, which is a leisure activity for the vast majority of people who do it.

In a recent survey of over 14,000 punters, 28% said they will stop betting on horseracing altogether if the current plans for affordability checks are implemented in full. That would be a catastrophe for horseracing, and it would be detrimental to the Chancellor's wish to sort out the nation's coffers. Most importantly, it means that those who enjoy gambling responsibly—and who do so in what is now a pretty well-regulated overall framework for ensuring that people get the support they need before the affordability checks are put in place—do not have the opportunity to exercise their right to that pleasure.

I will stop there, as I know many people want to speak. I hope to hear cheerful and positive encouragement from the Minister and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), because our great sport of horseracing needs their support. Critically, we need to make sure that the Gambling

Commission supports gambling that people enjoy while also effectively tackling problem gambling, rather than driving people into the darker regions of the internet, where they can get away from any regulation whatsoever. As the Member who represents Newmarket, I am proud to make this case.

2.49 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) on tabling this important debate. I start by declaring an interest: I am a board member of the Racehorse Owners Association. I have been to the races at the kind invitation of a number of people whose names are in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and I am a modest owner of racehorses; it would probably be better to say that I am the owner of modest racehorses.

Matt Hancock: I completely forgot to also draw the Chamber's attention to my registered interests. I have been kindly supported by many people from across horseracing over many years. They support me because I make these arguments; I do not make these arguments because they support me.

Philip Davies: I am sure that we are all grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his declaration. Unlike him and my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), I do not seek to ride any winning horses; I just try to back a few, with mixed results. At least when I lose, I know that I am contributing to the levy, as the right hon. Gentleman has encouraged us all to do.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, horseracing is a very successful sport in this country, but it is under increasing threat from foreign competition, particularly from the middle east. Many of our best horses are now sold to race there, where racing is much more profitable than in the United Kingdom.

Whether people like it or not, the vast majority of income for the racing industry comes through betting, one way or another. Owners put an awful lot of money into it without much expectation of return, and I can certainly vouch for that. Betting brings around £350 million a year into the industry. That is much more than the total prize money in the UK. If racing loses that betting income, the problem of horses moving overseas will only get worse. British racing would cease to be the best in the world. That would be terrible for the country as a whole, as well as for individual constituencies.

The right hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to focus much of his remarks on the issue of affordability checks, and I want to concentrate on it in the short time available to me. There is an issue of principle here. Who decides how much people can afford to bet on anything? Who decides what people can afford to spend on anything? We are in an interesting situation where the Government are deciding that people should have an affordability check on their betting, but on nothing else. People who spend a modest amount on betting—for example, those who lose £2,000 over 90 days—will undergo enhanced affordability checks.

I will illustrate how absurd the situation is. A racehorse owner might buy 10 horses, and spend £1 million each year at the sales buying those horses. None of that is subject to an affordability check. They then put those

10 horses in training, and pay fees of around £250,000 a year. None of that is subject to an affordability check. But if they were to spend £2,000 betting on those horses over a 90-day period, they would, at the Government's behest, be subject to an enhanced affordability check. It is complete nonsense. Surely nobody here thinks that those people should be subject to an affordability check on that basis.

The racing industry worries that people who spend an awful lot of money owning and buying horses, and who enjoy having a bet on their horses when they run, will leave the sport, because that betting part will be at risk if the Government go ahead with their plans. That would be tragic for the racing industry and for those people, and it cannot have been the Government's intention when they introduced affordability checks.

This blanket number is wrong, and why would it apply only to betting? Why is betting frowned upon to such an extent that the Government want to stick their nose in and find out whether I can afford to spend my money—it is my money, after all—on betting? They do not check whether I can afford to buy a pair of shoes, a coat, a suit or anything else. They want to interfere only if I am betting on anything, including horses. There is an important matter of principle here.

The intention behind some of the rules is ridiculous. For example, if someone loses £2,000 over 90 days, they get an enhanced affordability check, but they can offset only seven days of winnings against that. People's losses are mounted up over 90 days, but they can offset any winnings made over only seven days. That is absolute nonsense. People could literally win £10,000 on the placepots at Cheltenham in March, go to the grand national at Aintree and lose £2,000, and then have to have an affordability check, even though they are £8,000 up. No account is being taken of how much is won in the previous month or two months—only of what was won in the previous seven days. Those arbitrary figures are ridiculous.

People want proportionate checks. We are basically treating everybody who bets on anything in this country as a potential problem gambler, even though the rate of problem gambling in this country is very low, at about 0.3%.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): We are very proud to have two racecourses in the Windsor constituency. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that if the checks are introduced, all that will happen is that reasonable people who occasionally bet on horses will go to a black market site, where there will be no checks whatsoever? In fact, they will be exposed to all sorts of risks that we do not want, and there will be no revenue to UK horseracing.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. How many people will go to the black market is a matter of dispute; it is impossible to know. However, people like a bet, and the chances are that they will keep betting. If they cannot bet on legitimate sites, they will go to illegitimate sites. There is a lot of truth in what my hon. Friend says.

I ask the Minister to ensure that the Government's policy on this matter has a Conservative philosophy behind it. We believe that people should be free to spend their money as they wish, and we should not have

[Philip Davies]

bookmakers, the Gambling Commission and the Government deciding how much each individual can afford to bet on something. Let people make their own judgments and decisions; we have to have some individual responsibility. Any decisions must be proportionate to the problem, and we are very blessed to have low levels of problem gambling in this country. Those decisions have to focus on the wider impact on the horseracing industry, which cannot cope with the kind of reductions in betting that the right hon. Member for West Suffolk spoke about. That would be a disaster.

Many people in the racing industry think—I would be interested to know what the Minister thinks—that betting on horseracing is a game of skill; it is a matter of checking out the form, the draw, the ground and so on. When I back a horse, I do so scientifically. I can vouch for the fact that they do not always run scientifically, but I pick them scientifically. Does he think that games of skill should be treated differently from games of chance when it comes to betting? I would be interested to know his thoughts on that, because some people think that horseracing should be treated differently.

Many people make a living out of betting—professional gamblers. They go through good runs and bad runs. They will lose more than £2,000 over 90 days on many occasions, but they have won far more than that in the past. We cannot have blanket rules that are not sensible and that do not look at people's overall patterns of behaviour. On the back of the consultation, I urge the Minister to think again. I urge him to think about making affordability checks proportionate and about Conservative principles, and ask him to have at the forefront of his mind the future of the horseracing industry, which I know he does not want to damage in any way.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): If hon. Members can keep their speeches to around eight minutes or less, we should be great with time. I call Laura Farris.

2.58 pm

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) on securing the debate. I take issue with him on only one point: I think he described Newmarket as the finest headquarters of racing, but as the MP for Lambourn, I have to boast that we have some of the best trainers in the whole of the country. We also have Newbury racecourse, which is probably the best-known destination in my constituency. Collectively, the Lambourn industry employs over 1,000 people and raises nearly £20 million a year for the local economy. Much more than that, it is part of our heritage and our story, and it is a sport that many people in West Berkshire feel incredibly proud of and connected to.

One of the biggest misconceptions about racing arises from a lack of knowledge about animal welfare. I am very proud of how seriously we take animal welfare in my constituency. We have the Valley Equine Hospital, an exceptional veterinary facility that is essentially dedicated to racehorses recovering from races. We also have centres working to retrain racehorses and prepare them for private ownership and a much more sedentary life, such

as Retraining of Racehorses, just outside Lambourn, which is run by David Catlow, and HEROS, run by Grace Muir.

On the observation made by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk, HEROS, which retrains racehorses, works with a large number of young people—often of school age, but maybe nearing the end of school—who have had difficulties at school and may have troubled backgrounds or other significant obstacles in their life. It has transformed these young people's lives. Sometimes, working with animals allows people a channel of communication and development that no other channel in their life has afforded.

I say all this because I want to align myself with what my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) said about racing's uncertain future as a result of the affordability checks proposed under the review of the Gambling Act 2005. As a starting point, I think the general ambition to tackle problematic gambling is laudable. Problem gambling can ruin lives; it can suck people in. Gambling is highly addictive and can lead to a terrible downward spiral, in which people can lose everything: their marriage, their job, their home, and, in extremis, their life. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley is correct to say that it affects a tiny number of people—I think it is 0.3% of the population.

That kind of pernicious gambling has distinct features. It is far more closely connected with the sort of casino-type game typically found online, such as roulette or poker. Problem gambling has far less connection with horseracing, or many other sporting events. Horseracing in particular takes place at sporting events that many people will go to once or twice a year with their friends. They will have a big day out. They will have a flutter and a few drinks, and possibly push the envelope a bit. Greg Wood, the racing correspondent for *The Guardian*, put it this way in an article last month:

“The basic aim of affordability checks is a reasonable one... But the Gambling Commission's proposals make the same basic mistake that has plagued the regulation of gambling for the past 20 years. They fail to appreciate the significant differences—in staking patterns, margins, cycles of profit and loss and more—that distinguish betting, on racing and other sport, from fixed-margin gaming products like roulette and online slots.”

There is a deep concern in the racing industry that the measures proposed are disproportionate and will have a significant impact on horseracing overall. It has been said, quite reasonably, that affordability levels are set too low. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley mentioned the £2,000 red flag moment, but the very first affordability check actually kicks in at a loss of £125 over 30 days—a loss that someone could easily incur at one race meeting alone.

By setting out a fixed figure, the proposal fails to take into account income differentials, or previous winnings made outside a very narrow window. It is also unclear how, if at all, affordability checks can really be “frictionless”, as the Gambling Commission has suggested, when there is no real mechanism to ensure that they are. The head of the Lambourn Trainers Association wrote to me yesterday, and said that bookies in Newbury have already started to bring in the checks, which require proof of earnings, such as payslips, even before any legislation has been brought in. The Gambling Commission has said that the most intrusive checks will apply to around only 3% of gamblers, but think about that: there are just

under 32 million active gambling accounts held in the UK. Three per cent of that is still hundreds of thousands of people.

Half of all racegoers who responded to a survey conducted by British racing this October said they would either bet much less or stop betting altogether if they were required to provide proof of income. Most significantly, four out of 10 said that they would explore black market options instead. All that has the potential to be devastating. As the Minister will know, the White Paper estimates that the new protections would reduce horseracing betting gross gambling yields by somewhere between 6% and 11%, and that is before we take into account the behaviour of punters who do not particularly fancy a day at the races at which they have to prove their earnings.

This change will affect prize money, when British racing already pays out far less than its nearest competitors, such as Ireland and France, not to mention the middle east. If people cannot have a flutter, that will affect numbers going to the racecourse. It will also affect the value of media rights, which are integral to racing, the British Horseracing Authority says that it will seriously affect the levy and set horseracing on a path to financial decline.

I will make a final point about the levy. At present, racing receives a return of just over 2.8% of the total £10 billion that is spent on sport overall. That is the lowest of any major racing nation. The BHA estimates that the cost of affordability checks will result in an 11% reduction to the levy. That is money that would go directly to activities such as animal welfare, veterinary science and education—things that are crucial to helping the industry to develop and thrive.

I close by saying that if the Government wish to see British horseracing thrive, as I believe they do, they should remove racing from the affordability threshold test, recognising the difference between betting in sport and online gambling. Secondly, the Government should increase the percentage of the levy that is paid to British racing, to support more competitive prize money, funding for equine welfare development and all the other things that I listed at the beginning of my speech, and to bring us in line with our international competitors.

3.6 pm

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) on securing this debate. He is a passionate champion of British horseracing.

As an equine vet, I am absolutely passionate about this sector; I believe that it has a strong future, but we firmly need to look out for it and protect it. I should declare my professional and personal interests in this area. I am a veterinary surgeon, a fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the British Equine Veterinary Association. I was a member of the BHA's whip consultation steering group and a part of the BHA-convened horse and society group. In my past career, I have received research moneys from the Horserace Betting Levy Board and from the Horse Trust for veterinary research in equine health and welfare. I have chaired the World Horse Welfare conference for the last couple of years. Finally, I am an officer of the all-party parliamentary group on the horse.

I firmly believe that the future for this sector is strong. As we have heard in previous speeches, it provides £4.1 billion to the economy; it employs 20,000 people directly, and perhaps over 80,000 indirectly; there are 5 million racegoers a year, making it the second largest sport after football in this country; and there are 59 courses in the UK, hosting some of the great races, including the 1,000 Guineas, the 2,000 Guineas, the Epsom Derby, the Oaks, the St Leger, the Cheltenham gold cup and the grand national. In addition, there are 550 training yards, 660 stud farms and upwards of 14,000 horses in training.

I will restrict my comments today to certain areas. I will touch on money and finance, but I will focus on the people, the horses and the social licence. On the people involved, as we have heard, there are significant staff shortages in this sector, and the Migration Advisory Committee recommended earlier this month that certain parts of the equine sector be added to the shortage occupation list. I encourage the Government to accept that proposal. Also, there is potentially a shortage of vets, so we need to increase capacity and the training of vets, but we must also work to increase retention in the profession.

There is also the issue of people coming into the horse world. Many young people who come into this world do so through riding schools. However, there has been a 15% reduction in the number of riding schools since 2018, so that is also something we need to look at. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, produced a report on rural mental health. That involved talking to people in rural communities about their connectivity, transport and housing issues. People who work in the sector that we are discussing are affected by those issues, which we also need to look at.

To have a thriving horseracing industry, we need healthy horses, so we need to look out for their health and welfare. Biosecurity is absolutely pivotal in that regard, as is disease surveillance. Sadly, a few years ago we lost the Animal Health Trust in Newmarket, but the Cambridge vet school had the foresight to take in the trust's senior workers—Richard Newton, Fleur Whitlock and Máire O'Brien—so the equine infectious disease surveillance unit still exists. That is so important as an early warning system to keep the equine population safe.

Over the last few years, in the coronavirus pandemic, we saw the impact of a disease that is infectious to humans. In 2001, in the foot and mouth epidemic, racing was shut down, even though horses are not affected by foot and mouth virus.

During the equine influenza outbreak in 2019, British horseracing shut down for a short period, and in 2022 there was a shortage of flu vaccines for horses; so we need to keep an eye on the availability of medicines and vaccines. Heaven forbid we get an exotic disease such as African horse sickness coming into our country, but if we did the impact would be catastrophic—the level of magnitude of foot and mouth disease—so we need to be very, very clear on that.

I realise this is not the Minister's responsibility, but the future of horseracing needs to be looked at by DCMS and also the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and across Government. We need to adequately fund the Animal and Plant Health Agency, which needs a rebuild and redevelopment. The Government have committed £1.2 billion, but it needs

[Dr Neil Hudson]

another £1.6 billion. We had the Secretary of State and the permanent secretary in front of the EFRA Committee yesterday and they are clear that the agency needs to be redeveloped. Again, I put that on the record.

On EFRA we produced a report on the movement of animals across borders. Some of the key recommendations included improving the equine identification system in central databases. People involved in the horseracing industry will know about the free, safe and practical movement of horses. Prior to leaving the EU there was the tripartite agreement between the UK, France and Ireland. We need to get a good replacement for that, so that the high performance elite animals can be moved safely and practically.

Equally, we need to improve identification so that we can stop the abhorrent practice of horses being illegally exported to Europe for slaughter. We must clamp down on that.

I will say something briefly about money, although that has been covered by colleagues. On the Horserace Betting Levy Board, there is a need for reform. It is important to make sure that part of the moneys coming in gets put back into the sector to support the people and the horses in terms of improving racing and breeding and also the advancement of veterinary science and research. The HBLB does great work in producing codes of practice in infectious diseases.

On the social licence, it is so important for horseracing to have that contract with the public and the public consent for that great sport to be allowed to continue. I believe that racing gets that. The British Horseracing Authority's whip review has started that work. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) mentioned equine welfare. Some great work has been done by the BHA's Horse Welfare Board, which produced the "A life well-lived" document.

We need to ensure that we support foals from birth to the start of their racing career and through to retirement and beyond. I firmly back my hon. Friend's comments on the Retraining of Racehorses charity. We must look after the animals throughout their entire journey.

On safety and welfare, there are increasing veterinary checks in racing to make it a safer sport for the horses and the jockeys. That is an important part of the social licence as well. In Australia they have had lots more pre-racing diagnostic imaging panels set up for the Melbourne cup, which is something that is being looked at internationally. There is increasing research into injuries and fatalities.

I very much welcome the grand national's changes for next year. Over the years we have seen changes in the jumps, but next year they will be reducing the number of runners from 40 to 34. The first fence will be brought closer to the start and there will be a standing start to reduce the speed of the horses when they take the first jump. It is important that the industry is aware of that, so that that social licence granted by the public continues moving forward. I believe the racing industry gets it, and we need to move forward on that.

If we look after the people and the horses and have sensible and pragmatic financing, and put some of that financing back into supporting those people and horses, the future of racing will be bright.

3.13 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I apologise for being a couple of minutes late, Mr Hosie; I was taking part in the Select Committee Chair vote, which was delayed because of the main vote. May I congratulate the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) on securing the debate and say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship? I need to declare that I am the joint chair of the all-party parliamentary group on racing and bloodstock. I have Cheltenham Racecourse in my constituency. I also have an entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I receive occasional hospitality at racecourses, and up to the end of June I was an adviser to the Betting and Gaming Council.

I do not want to repeat what has been said, other than to say that I agree with pretty much every word spoken so far. British horseracing is the best in the world but, rather paradoxically, it is probably the worst funded. The money it generates for a constituency such as mine, in just four days in March, was estimated at the last count to be about £270 million for the whole area. That is not just the racecourse, but the hotels, restaurants, pubs, taxi companies and everything else, and that is replicated across the country. It is important that we understand what we are dealing with here. It is easy to see Royal Ascot and the Derby with people in fine clothes, top hats and everything else and think that horseracing is a very rich sport. It is known as the sport of kings—it is in some ways—but that is the top 1%. The rest of the pyramid is very poor indeed.

We have heard some figures already, but I want to mention how, quite often, at the lower end, where horses start, the prize money can be as low as £2,000 per race. When we take the jockey and trainer's cuts out of that, along with other costs, the owner is left with very little, and to break even at the lower level, an owner would have to win about 12 or 13 races a year. They are not going to do that, so they have guaranteed losses. This is no exaggeration: the whole sport's future is dependent on owners being prepared to continue to lose money and we cannot make that situation any worse. The prize money in this country is lower than in France and Ireland. When I last checked, the prize money in Hong Kong was 15 times the prize money in this country. We really do have an issue and it is important that we understand the starting point.

Secondly, the link with betting is crucial. As we have heard, betting companies pay about £365 million into racing every year through the statutory levy, picture rights and sponsorship. They will only continue to do so as long as racing is a profitable product for them. It is very important that they do. I only have a slight caveat to add to what my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk said about the reform of the levy. I understand where he is coming from, but we must not think we can mop up the losses that will be caused by the affordability checks with the levy. That is not a trade-off worth considering and I must stress that it will not work like that.

These days, Governments have very little say in or influence on the running of horseracing, except with regard to the levy and, rather unfortunately, some of the rules that the Government are considering setting out for gambling. I must say first that I have known people who have suffered addictions. I have also been heartbroken, as we all have, by some of the stories I have read about people who have taken their own lives

because their gambling habits got out of hand. I am horrified by those stories and am firmly with the Government in wanting to address those terrible situations. The question is: how do we do that best?

We have to understand that somebody who loses more money than might be good for them is not necessarily an addict. The two things are different. Addiction is a very different thing and has to be properly addressed. I suggest we make sure that gambling companies put systems in place that detect people who have or who might develop problems and then take action to prevent those problems occurring. I am not convinced that we will achieve that with the proposals. Indeed, paradoxically, we could actually end up missing the people who need most of the help. I want to see the Government take a step back on this, have a look at what we are doing and see the damage that could be done to horseracing without actually helping the people we all want to see helped.

The Government have frequently said that the checks will be frictionless and that people will not even notice them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) said, they will apply to just 3% of punters. To start with, it depends how we calculate the 3%. However, I am really concerned about how, in a recent survey of 14,000 people who bet, more than a quarter said they had already had affordability checks carried out on them even though the system is not in place yet. How bad is it going to get if the Gambling Commission is allowed to run away with this? I just do not know how much damage it could do to horseracing.

British horseracing is the best in the world. We have the iconic races: the grand national, the Derby, the Royal Ascot and the Cheltenham gold cup. That is how people view this country. It is a fantastic sport, but it is under threat. I know for certain that the Government, who I support, would not want to do any damage to the horseracing industry. The Minister is always available and very willing to have discussions. I thank him for that, but we need to have more detailed discussion to see how we can help those we all want to help. No one wants to see people harmed as a result of any kind of addiction. Lots of people go in pubs, but the last person we want in a pub is someone with a drinking problem. That is how we must view this. I ask the Minister and the Government to be prepared to hold even further discussions with us beyond the consultation, so that we can get this right together.

3.21 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Thank you, Mr Hosie, for chairing this debate, which has been fascinating. I have learned a huge amount about British racing. I declare an interest: I do not represent Newmarket or Cheltenham, but Fakenham—a fantastically formed, albeit small, national hunt course—is in my constituency. The topography is such that one can see the entire race from the stands. It is a really lovely place, and it employs 132 people on race days, all from Fakenham and the surrounding area. It is not just about the direct employment; the beneficial impact of having a course like Fakenham in my constituency is more widely felt like that in the town—

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I have a confession to make: Fakenham was the first racecourse I ever went to. When I went, it had a chase course that went out

beyond the point. Would my hon. Friend agree that the supply chain for British racing extends out of training centres and the courses we know about, into the countryside and studs? Its tentacles go right through towns in this country into those licenced betting offices that are features of all our towns. There are people employed in that wider industry on high streets everywhere around this country.

Jerome Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is quite right. It is not just about the betting offices in towns, but the restaurants and hotels that are supported by Fakenham race days. I declare an interest: I have enjoyed a day's racing at Fakenham courtesy of the racecourse's trustees. I think they threw in a sandwich as well. That should be included on the record. It was delicious. I hope to go again later this year—[Laughter]—depending on the outcome of this debate.

Many Members have spoken about the benefits to the national economy of racing. I will not repeat them; they have been well rehearsed. I want to focus on the local benefits of racing to rural communities like mine. The Gambling Act review is causing Fakenham huge concern. The proposed enhanced checks for problem gamblers will be incredibly important for two communities: problem gamblers—they must be assisted, not hurt, by this decision—and the racing industry. It is a truism that, like any important decision, it should be based on best evidence, not ideology.

Judging by this debate, which I have listened to, there appears to be a massive conflict of evidence. It depends on who one listens to. According to the racing industry, the existing checks to reduce problem gamblers have not had a minimal impact and have not been taken in the industry's stride. In fact, they have cost it about £1 billion. It is argued that as a result of this withdrawal of cash from the industry, about 1,000 racehorses have been taken out of training, bringing the number in training comfortably below 15,000 for the first time in a long time. That is a very heavy impact on the industry.

Perhaps it is worth it. Perhaps the benefits of the current checks on problem gamblers are so positive that it is worth imposing a cost of £1 billion on the racing industry. But they have been in place for two years now. What does the evidence show us? There were nine characteristics of harm from gambling that were associated with the assessment of the efficacy of these new rules. Have they changed? I am sorry to say that despite costing the industry £1 billion, of those nine measures of gambling-related harm, not a single one has improved during that period.

At the very least, this should cause the Government to pause for consideration, rather than doubling down on yet more of the same seemingly failed approach. Losing £1 billion for no measurable impact on the nine metrics that the Gambling Commission considered were the right ones to measure is not a result that would lead one to think, "Oh yes, we need to go further in the same direction." The Gambling Commission tells us that the current proposals will also have very little, or minimal, impact on the industry. As one of the other contributors has mentioned, it says that about 3% of the accounts will be affected. But the evidence from the industry is that this is already incorrect. Somebody only has to read the front page of the *Racing Post*, of which I hope

[Jerome Mayhew]

many Members here are subscribers, to see the multiple accounts of people changing their betting habits even before the new restrictions come in.

Just this month, there was a survey in which 15,000 racing gamblers took part—so a very substantial survey. More than 50% said they would stop betting or significantly reduce their betting because of these personally intrusive checks, which include one's job title and postcode, while 40% of them said that they would consider moving towards black market betting, which 10% have already done. What outcome are the Government seeking to achieve for those with problems in gambling? Is it to drive and increase the size and scope of the black market industry, where there is no regulation at all, and where problem gambling is actively encouraged because it maximises profitability? If that is what they want to do, just the threat of this consultation review is already causing that to happen.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech and I agree with everything that he is saying. Does he also recognise the danger of driving people towards international gambling organisations online, which, although perfectly legal, have none of the checks that we would have, and where, as he is describing about the black market, they have all the incentives in the system to drive people into addiction?

Jerome Mayhew: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's contribution. Of course, he is absolutely right. There are many seemingly unintended consequences of the current proposals. I have yet to see any worked examples backed by genuine evidence, as opposed to the expressions of hope from the Gambling Commission, that support an alternative interpretation.

If we are worried about unintended consequences, I encourage the Minister during this welcome consultation to follow the evidence and not ideology; to support rural employers like Fakenham; to support the fantastic day out that racing provides to 5 million people a year and the pleasure that it gives them; to support the economies that rely on racing in places like Fakenham and around the country; to support fun betting, which in itself provides revenue to help the 0.3% of the gambling public that has a serious problem; and to support the long-term future of this fantastic racing industry in our country.

3.29 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie, and for a change, I actually mean that this time around. Can I start with an apology to Members for being a little late for the start, and particularly to the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) for missing the opening couple of minutes of his remarks? From the Australian jungle with Ant and Dec to the Vietnamese jungle with the SAS to plain old Westminster Hall, it is indeed a pleasure to see him here. I agreed with a chunk of what he said, but I have to say that I disagree with what he and many others on the Tory Benches said about affordability, which I will come to later.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and I seem to have found ourselves on different sides of just about every argument since I was elected in 2015.

He made a comparison between spending on gambling and spending on suits and shoes and other forms of expenditure. The contribution from the hon. Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), who spoke of how severe the issues are with problem gambling, shows how ridiculous that analogy actually is.

In my first year as an MP, one of the first cases I took was from a chap in Linwood who had lost absolutely everything because of his problem gambling. He then spent a long time campaigning to try to improve the lot of others and some of the safeguards around gambling. I very much remember that case and have obviously stuck up for that.

Philip Davies: Given that he is particularly concerned about the damage that certain things do, and affordability checks are therefore important in that, does he believe that affordability checks should be brought in for people who buy alcohol, since alcohol does far more damage to people than gambling?

Gavin Newlands: When we talk about gambling, we often compare it with alcohol and tobacco, so that is a perfectly fair challenge. The Scottish Government have tried to recognise the harms of alcohol, with our minimum unit price on it.

Philip Davies: But that is not an affordability check.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Order.

Gavin Newlands: But it is a problem, so that supports my argument, not the hon. Gentleman's, I would suggest. I will come on to affordability checks later and if he wants to intervene then, he is more than welcome to do so.

With that all being said, the Scottish Government obviously recognise the benefits of racing to the economy and the positive impact that it has had on employment in communities across Scotland. The 2018 annual review highlighted that the sport generated more than £300 million to the Scottish economy, as well as sustaining nearly 3,500 full-time equivalent jobs. Who can forget that, yet again, Corach Rambler brought home the grand national to Scotland earlier this year? According to Scottish Racing, by 2025, the impact of Scottish racing is projected to rise from just over £300 million to half a billion pounds of revenue for Scotland's economy, with £50 million in tax revenues. Each year, most of that goes to the Scottish Government.

Racing remains the second most popularly attended sport in Scotland after football. It attracts a diverse section of society, with nearly nine out of 10 racegoers comprising people from both middle and lower socioeconomic groups. Females account for over half of all race-goers in Scotland, and it is set to support 3,700 jobs, including in employment across Scotland's racecourses and tourism activities supported by race-goers. It also supports or sustains jobs through the development of racehorses such as Corach Rambler, media coverage of race days and off-course betting.

From time to time, all of us will receive, particularly around the grand national and what have you, a number of emails about animal welfare in relation to horseracing. The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson)

can speak better than the rest of us combined on this issue, given his depth of knowledge, so it was good to have his input, too.

Animal welfare is covered by devolved legislation, which makes the keeper of an animal responsible for its welfare and permits the prosecution of those who do not ensure such welfare, such as the need for a suitable environment, and so on. The British Horseracing Authority, which I have met a couple of times over the years, assures us that it complies with all aspects of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 through its rules of racing and the licensing and inspection of participants. It works closely with a range of animal welfare organisations, such as World Horse Welfare, to maintain and promote horse welfare. The BHA also seeks to minimise the risk of injury and fatality to thoroughbred horses on racecourses, and it records and analyses such incidents.

Much of today's discussion has been about the gambling levy and affordability. We in the SNP think that the gambling levy should go further to tackle gambling-related harms, such as by dealing with advertising, regulating online bookmakers and ensuring that the levy funding is allocated properly. As the Minister will know, this is a completely reserved matter, and a review took place that generated some 16,000 responses. Forty-seven per cent of people surveyed in the UK had gambled in some way in the four weeks before the survey. Most gambling—I am happy to admit that I very occasionally dabble, although it has been a number of years since I have done so—is done without any harm. However, for those who face problem gambling, the impact can be harmful and addictive, with one person committing suicide in the UK every day because of gambling-related harms. Thankfully, the Gambling Act will be modernised and made more effective for the digital age by providing adequate protections, notwithstanding a lot of the very good points made about some of the overseas websites, which we need to do more to address.

Philip Davies: I think I heard the hon. Gentleman repeat the figure of one person committing suicide every day as a result of gambling. He should know that that figure is not accurate but has virtually been plucked out of thin air. If he wants to give a quote for the basis of the figure, I would love to hear it. The figure, which has often been quoted by Gambling with Lives, has been debunked, not least by the Gambling Commission. I hope he will not rely on that dodgy information.

Gavin Newlands: That is the other side of the argument. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and I am happy to write to him with the source of the figure I am using.

Two million families in the UK are blighted by problem gambling, and more than 55,000 children aged between 11 and 16 are addicted to gambling, with 60% of the gambling industry's profits coming from 5% of gamblers. A poll by Clean Up Gambling found that 72% of the public supported affordability checks for those who want to bet more than £100 a month, and 74% supported limits on how much money can be staked on a single online bet. Without affordability being addressed, individuals suffering from gambling harm will switch between online operators and continue losing money, with potentially catastrophic consequences, as I outlined by mentioning my constituent and, indeed—

Matt Hancock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: I have only a minute or two left, but I am happy to do so.

Matt Hancock: I bow to no one in my support for tackling problem gambling. I went toe to toe with the gambling industry by introducing FOBTs as Secretary of State, to its great unhappiness, but is the industry not right on this? The hon. Gentleman just said that the public want action on online gambling, but it comes down to this point: gambling on horseracing is materially different from gambling on games of pure chance, whereby people know they are going to lose over time because the technology is designed in such a way that there is no fluke, no luck and no skill. The two are materially different. If we do not understand that, we will simply end up destroying a sport to try to protect people from something completely different.

Gavin Newlands: I accept the premise of the right hon. Gentleman's point, but that is why the SNP is calling for a smart gambling levy that is scaled to the damage that gambling does. There has obviously been cross-party agreement on FOBTs over the past couple of years, but the levy would be higher. We can agree to disagree on many things, but we can certainly agree on others.

I have another couple of points that I would like to make, but time has defeated me. I should perhaps not be so generous in taking interventions next time around.

3.39 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) on securing this important debate. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Indeed, just a few weeks ago, I attended Donny races along with many others from Barnsley, South Yorkshire and across the country.

Horseracing is our country's second largest sport—second only to football. Each year, races attract over 5 million spectators across the country, but it is not just people who attend the races that benefit from the sport. Horseracing supports 80,000 jobs and generates more than £4 billion a year for the country, giving it a wider economic importance, as the hon. Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) and many others said. That is without mentioning the impact the industry has in generating a positive view of our country across the world, with events like Royal Ascot attracting international competitors and spectators. With that in mind, the future of racing must be protected for generations to come.

In recent years, however, horseracing has been at risk of decline. Further to the pandemic, which cost millions in lost revenue, trainers are now also bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis. That has impacted everything from the price of feed to the cost of transportation, but British horseracing was facing serious concerns even before these challenges. The UK has experienced a drop in the percentage of grade 1 races that it holds, as well as a crisis in equine talent moving abroad.

One of the underlying causes of the decline is the level of prize money available to British competitions. Despite reaching record highs in 2022, British prize

[Stephanie Peacock]

levels are still significantly lower than rival competitions in France, Ireland, the USA, Australia, Japan and Hong Kong, as the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) mentioned. A poor prize pot means poor incentives for everyone in the racing industry—from owners to spectators—to compete and take an interest in British competition.

The racing industry has gone to great efforts to prevent decline and to see the sport grow. For example, as part of their new long-term industry strategy, the BHA has worked hard to secure a boost to prize funds and to publish a 2024 fixture list that includes 170 premier race days. Likewise, the betting industry has continued to foster its relationship with racing, including spending £125 million on marketing to promote racing. Despite that, more must still be done to ensure the future of British racing. For many, that change will start with the horserace betting levy.

Currently, the horserace betting levy is funded directly by bookmakers at a fixed rate of 10% of the gross profit made on British horseraces. Since its introduction, the levy has delivered around £80 million to £100 million of funding annually for the sport—a level that has been maintained in recent years despite declining turnover. Compared with other countries, however, the overall percentage of return that racing receives from the betting industry is on the low end of the scale at 3%. It is welcome, therefore, that the Government have committed to reviewing the levy to ensure that it delivers an appropriate level of funding for the sector. That review must answer the many questions being asked about the levy's current structure.

I ask the Minister for a clear update on the progress of the review, including whether the Department has made any judgment on whether the levy should be raised, linked to inflation or adjusted to cover all bets by British customers, including those on international races. It is essential that the review looks to protect racing and its relationship with the gambling sector in the round. In that vein, I also ask the Minister for an update on what the Department is doing to ensure that money paid by gambling firms for racing media rights is actually benefiting the sport. For example, what meetings has the Minister had specifically with media rights companies to ensure that money is moving from betting to racing in a way that positively impacts the sport?

Concern has also been raised about the impact of the gambling White Paper and particularly—as has been mentioned a number of times in the debate—affordability checks on horseracing. Although I have only recently been appointed as the shadow Minister with responsibility for gambling, I have already met a number of charities and organisations that work to prevent gambling harms, providing a range of treatment, education and advice. Although there is, of course, a spectrum of gambling harm, I have seen at first hand that gambling addiction can have a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and their families. It is therefore important that gambling regulation is updated. Indeed, the last Gambling Act was introduced back in 2005, long before the huge growth in online and mobile gambling opportunities. An update to that is well overdue, and the Government must waste no further time in introducing a modern system of gambling regulation that is fit for the future.

Affordability checks will form an important part of that and must be set independently, rather than by the industry. These checks must be accompanied by online stake limits, data sharing between gambling firms and a crackdown on black market activity funded through the regulator.

However, as well as ensuring that the law protects children and adults vulnerable to gambling harms, it is important to ensure that the regulation recognises that millions of people enjoy betting safely and without harm. The Government must therefore be very clear on how they will go about ensuring that affordability checks are frictionless for consumers, as they have promised. The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) used the word “proportionate”, which I think is a good one. That is important for the sustainability of the gambling industry, which we know racing relies upon, and for ensuring that customers are not incentivised to leave the regulated market and turn to the black market. The safety of racehorses is also fundamental.

Philip Davies: I welcome the hon. Lady to her post. I agree with the overwhelming majority of what she has said, and I commend her for it. I wonder what she thinks of the issue that a number of Members have raised about whether games of skill should be treated differently from games of chance when it comes to gambling regulation, whether it is affordability checks or any other measure.

Stephanie Peacock: That is a very valid point, and it is one for the Minister to address. A balance needs to be struck. We have to recognise that gambling, whatever form it is in, can devastate lives. I have acknowledged in my comments that there is a spectrum and that not everyone who gambles has a problem, but we need to ensure that the regulation is fit for the modern day.

I want to talk briefly about welfare. When I was at Doncaster races, the British Horseracing Authority showed me round and explained some of the vital measures that were in place to maximise the welfare of racehorses. I was really interested to hear the contribution from the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), who spoke with great experience and knowledge of the issue.

Following the tragic events at this year's grand national, which left many distressed, it is welcome that the industry has come together to implement a package of safety measures before next year's race, including reducing the maximum number of runners, investing in course infrastructure and ensuring that participating horses are in good enough condition to compete. I welcome that. Equine care must be at the forefront of the industry's concerns, and the hon. Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) spoke about the veterinary centre in her constituency.

To conclude, the Labour party acknowledges the huge contribution that horseracing makes to both our culture and our economy. I have a number of personal memories of the races, in particular of attending the Yorkshire cup last year, where I watched the super stayer horse under Frankie Dettori win. I was there with my very good friend, the late Jim Andrews, who passed away not long after that. It was one of the last days we spent together, and it is an incredibly fond memory of mine. I know that people across the country will have similarly fond memories, and that is why it is really important that we protect the future of the industry.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) for securing this important and timely debate, and I appreciate his support for horse racing not only in his constituency but across Britain.

The Government acknowledge the significant contribution that racing makes to our economy. As has been rightly mentioned by Members from constituencies across the country, it plays a central role in the livelihoods of many people in our rural communities. The employment that it supports across racecourses, training yards, breeding operations and related sectors reflects a powerhouse industry that is respected at home and abroad, and it is one that I am keen to explore even further through a forthcoming visit to a training yard. We absolutely agree that British racing is a substantial asset to the country and remain committed to supporting the industry.

As many Members have said, horse racing is the second biggest sport in the UK in terms of attendance and contributes £4 billion annually to the economy in direct, indirect and associated expenditure. The fact that so many people go to the great races—some 65,000 to 70,000 to the grand national, and 200,000 over the four days of the Cheltenham festival—shows how important it is. I have seen that at first hand during my visit to Newmarket this summer and in discussions with the Jockey Club and Arena Racing Company, as well as the measures around welfare, which were particularly interesting to see in Newmarket. The industry enjoys a reputation as a global leader and is part of the GREAT campaign, which recognises that horse racing is a valuable asset and has a tremendous amount of soft power.

My hon. Friends have noted the importance of the levy. As has been said, in 2017, the levy was extended to online bookmakers and fixed at the rate of 10%, so that it no longer had to be negotiated each year. That has seen a significant rise—almost doubling in amount from £49 million to £95 million—and the forecast for 2022-23 is around £100 million.

On the horserace betting review, the British Horseracing Authority has presented its case that there is a significant gap in its funding that means that it cannot compete with jurisdictions such as France and Ireland. The authority has submitted suggestions on how to close the gap, and we are considering those proposals as we undertake our review, which is due by April next year. Of course, I cannot pre-empt the outcome of that at this stage, but I reassure all colleagues that the decision will be firmly based on the evidence.

Changes would require legislation, so a sensible first step is to explore a voluntary agreement, especially when there are so many competing demands on parliamentary time. We are looking at all options and encouraging racing and betting to work together in the best interests of the sport. Reaching a mutual agreement on the way forward for the levy would be beneficial for everybody. To support that aim, the BHA and the BGC were invited to submit evidence over the summer and have been given extensions to come to an agreement. I met both groups in early September for an update on the discussions, and I look forward to hearing more from them when I meet them again in the next few weeks.

The levy is not the only source of funding for racing. It represented just 6% of racing's total income in '22, and far greater proportions were earned from owners, breeders, racegoers, media rights deals and sponsorship. While we review what the levy provides, we have also asked racing and betting to explore jointly how they can maximise other sources of income for racing. I am encouraged by the close engagement that has taken place and welcome the recent changes to the fixture list, which should bring an additional £90 million to racing by 2028.

The BHA and other industry stakeholders have raised concerns about the impact of the financial risk checks that were set out in the Government's White Paper in April. As the darling of the *Racing Post*, as I seem to be these days, I want to reassure everyone that I have heard those concerns and take them very seriously. I have already met many Members who are present today, including members of the all-party parliamentary group on racing and bloodstock, and we have many more meetings to come. Given that the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is next door to mine, I cannot avoid him, as much as I may try, but I commit to those meetings carrying on long after the consultations have been completed.

Philip Davies: Given that the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) and I actually agree on this issue, which does not happen very often, does the Minister accept that we really must be on to something?

Stuart Andrew: If only I could have achieved that when I was the deputy Chief Whip—that would have been great, but there we go.

I have also met with horse racing bettor forums to hear about this from a customer's perspective, which is incredibly important, and I will continue to engage with all those stakeholders. Let me also take this opportunity to address a couple of important points. The first is to distinguish between the checks that many operators are currently doing and the future system that was set out in the White Paper. At present, the Gambling Commission has not set specific thresholds or requirements for how or when operators must consider customers' financial circumstances. There has only been an ask to prevent a repetition of the cases in which operators allow rapid losses that would be life-changing for most of us. However, that has led to inconsistency across the sector, with different operators seeking proofs at different points, often in the form of onerous documentation such as payslips and bank statements. We also know that many operators are requesting personal financial information for a range of reasons that are not necessarily related to safer gambling. I have heard concerning reports that some operators are using checks as a way of restricting the accounts of successful bettors. As a result of listening to all of this, I have spoken to the Gambling Commission CEO about these issues. I asked him to challenge operators to be more transparent with customers and more consistent in how they apply the checks now. They are looking at that and I am waiting to hear back in the coming weeks.

My focus is also on the new coherent national framework underpinned by data sharing, which was outlined in the White Paper and the consultation. We want it to be a significant improvement for customers and companies, to have clear requirements and a much smoother process

[Stuart Andrew]

for assessments, and crucially to bring uniformity rather than the process that people are seeing now and which has been described by Members here today. It will ensure that we see no more of those terrible cases where people lose tens of thousands of pounds in a very short time. As the Minister for gambling, I have also had to hear the awful stories that families have raised with me, and it is right that we act in that area.

I agree with many Members who have pointed out the need to be proportionate. The White Paper was clear: we only want checks for those most at risk of harm. We want the checks themselves to be painless for the overwhelming majority of customers, and neither the Government nor the Gambling Commission should put a blanket cap on how much money people spend on gambling. That will be at the forefront of our minds. The point about being frictionless is essential. I reiterate my commitment that proposed checks will not be mandated across the sector until we are confident that they are frictionless for the vast majority of customers who will be caught by them. The Gambling Commission will continue to work closely with gambling operators, the financial services sector and the Information Commissioner's Office to develop the checks. We are also exploring options such as pilots and phased implementation. I am pleased that the Gambling Commission has agreed to host a series of workshops with the industry to explore these in detail.

It is important that the wider public have their say too. It is great that the Gambling Commission's recent consultation received over 3,500 responses, many of which focused on financial risk checks and the relationship with racing. The regulator is working hard to analyse those responses and, notwithstanding its statutory independence, we will continue to work closely with it as it refines proposals before introducing new requirements. The consultation was on all aspects and all details, including the levels at which those checks will come in and how we consider the previous winnings.

The Government are keen to ensure that measures such as these checks do not adversely affect racing or interrupt the customer journey. They also cannot push

away high-net-worth individuals such as owners and trainers who invest in the sport. We want to protect those at risk of harm, but with minimal disruption to the majority who, I recognise, place bets on horseracing with no ill effect. I also want to point out that the proposals the Commission are consulting on will apply only to online gambling accounts; they will not affect betting shops or on-course bookmakers.

On the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk about the workforce, the Migration Advisory Committee has recommended adding six racing roles to the shortage occupation list. That recommendation is currently being considered by the Home Office, but I will ensure that I write to my colleagues there to highlight this debate.

The Government remain committed to supporting horseracing in this country. It is vital to the rural economy and a source of great pleasure to many people. I look forward to further discussions on these important issues, especially as the review of the levy continues.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): I call Matt Hancock, for the briefest of wind-ups.

3.59 pm

Matt Hancock: Very briefly, I welcome the Minister's confirmation that the levy review will happen by April 2024. However, overwhelming concern has been expressed from Fakenham to Bangor, from Newbury to Newmarket, from *The Guardian* to the *Racing Post*, and across the House, by Labour, the Lib Dems and the DUP, as well as the Conservative party—and, within the Conservative party, from the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) to the hon. Member for Newbury (Laura Farris). When they agree, they must be right. I cannot see how we can ever have frictionless checks—how we should ever have frictionless checks—if the checks involve looking at someone's income or bank account. I urge the Minister to take away this key point: there is a difference in different types of betting, and there is a serious risk of unintended consequences in the current approach, which is going to make things worse.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Rural Postal Services: Sustainability

4 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the sustainability of rural post offices.

It is a pleasure, as ever, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. Balintore is a coastal village 595 miles from London and seven miles from my home town of Tain. It has no bank, a fair number of elderly residents and a bus service that is, to say the least, infrequent. When the people of Balintore and the neighbouring villages of Shandwick and Hilton heard that the local Spar shop would no longer provide a post office service, they were downcast, to say the least. There seemed no way to avoid the complete disappearance of the local post office.

Then, step forward one Maureen Ross. Maureen, a Seaboard village local, has long been a dynamo of community work. True to form, she did not disappoint. Maureen dared to ask whether the post office could be part of the local community hall, the Seaboard Memorial Hall in Balintore. The hall is already much used by the community and is a provider of excellent meals and coffee.

Maureen, in true form, approached the Post Office bosses with that innovative proposal. Fast forward to today, we have a successful local Balintore post office, open five mornings a week. Pensions are collected, bills are paid and cash withdrawn. It is the place where older folk can go about their day-to-day business and stop to have a cuppa and a chinwag.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I am delighted to hear about the success story in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. When a rural post office closes, as he mentioned, a post box often remains in the vicinity. Residents will be keen for the post box to remain functional, as is the case at (Stoke) post office in Hayling Island in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that keeping post boxes functional, even where the post office has closed, can help make post offices and postal services more sustainable and successful in the long term?

Jamie Stone: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman makes a wise point. A final point on Maureen Ross: she has protected a fundamental pillar of that community. It is no surprise that a few weeks ago she was elected as a member of the Highland Council. She recognised that a network of local post offices is integral to the social fabric of our nation.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is worth bearing in mind that our banks have pretty much vacated our towns, villages, high streets and communities over the past few years. They must have saved themselves hundreds of millions of pounds in salaries, upkeep and all the rest of it. Does my hon. Friend agree that the banks should be forced by the Government to pay a far higher fee to post offices, so they can be sustainable in the long run, perhaps even becoming a front for all Government activity in their communities?

Jamie Stone: My hon. Friend is correct. He represents a remote constituency, as I do. When I talk about the social fabric of the nation, it is important to have a network of post offices in those remote areas.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this forward. It is more than just post offices; it is about rural communities. Does he agree that isolated communities rely heavily on a reliable, frequent service, and investment should be made to ensure that daily deliveries, as the postie does his rounds in our rural constituencies, are not a bonus but are a standard? Would he join me in thanking posties and delivery personnel who carry out this vital service on difficult roads in difficult conditions at the right time for us all?

Jamie Stone: Again, a very good intervention; I completely agree. I have described a success story, for which I thank the Post Office for seeing that it happened. Now I turn to a more difficult situation. On the north coast of Sutherland, in my constituency, there are two local post offices at villages called Melvich and Bettyhill. They are now worried about their viability.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the previous Labour Government stripped post offices of many of their unique services and the current Government have not supported post offices as they should have done during the recent difficult times. Does he agree that that has made the sustainability of post offices all the more challenging, particularly in rural areas such as Brodick on the Isle of Arran, which is now facing the closure of its post office?

Jamie Stone: The point is well made. I will give this specific detail: until now, Royal Mail, which is a separate organisation, has paid each of the two post offices I described to have a parcel and letter sorting facility at the back of their shops. Technically, that is termed a scale payment delivery office or SPDO, which is where posties go to sort the letters and parcels, to avail themselves of toilet facilities and, indeed, to have a sit-down to eat what we in the highlands would call their piece at lunchtime. I have been told that those contracts are due to end this coming January, leaving the shops without the funding for an SPDO. In the case of Bettyhill, the shop will lose a significant sum of money. It means that posties will have to meet in the public car park to sort the mail and swap parcels between vans. That is a pretty unpleasant prospect when we think about some of the weather we have had recently in my constituency.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. This year, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee produced a report on rural mental health, and pivotal to that was rural isolation, with people needing access to vital services, including postal services and banks. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is beholden on both central and local government to work with communities to protect and uphold those services for the benefit of rural constituents?

Jamie Stone: I absolutely concur with that, and it brings me to my next point. When nature calls for our posties, they have been advised that they will simply have to use public toilets rather than what was at the back of the shop. At this time of year in the highlands, many public toilets are closed. This is about the overall approach described by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, and getting all the services, the council and local government to act together.

[*Jamie Stone*]

What happens if there is a parcel for Mrs McKay on the north coast, but she is not at home when the postie comes to deliver it? In the past, it would go back to the local post office and would be put, in the case of Bettyhill, in a safe room and stored there. Now, however, it has to go all the way back to Thurso, which is a good 30 miles from Bettyhill and 17 from Melvich. That is far beyond the usual access criteria set by the Post Office, which says that those living in rural areas should live “within three miles” of their local branch. That is no good to my hypothetical Mrs McKay. She might not drive, she might be elderly and, as I have said, she can hardly rely on public transport.

Keir Mather (Selby and Ainsty) (Lab): There is a point about staffing of rural post offices. Eggborough post office in my constituency has to close at 1 pm on most days due to staffing pressures. Does the hon. Member agree that specific support could be allocated by Government to meet some of those staffing deficiencies so that rural post offices are more viable in future?

Jamie Stone: Yes, indeed. I completely agree with that. I hope that some constructive thinking will now be forthcoming. As I have said already, this is part of our social fabric.

Earlier, I touched on loss of income for shops. The post office at Bettyhill will lose almost £7,500 a year. As I have said, that could mean not only further post office closures but shop closures. Pillars of rural communities will be demolished by cost-cutting tactics: we see all too much of that in the highlands, with that weary drumbeat of closures and cutting back.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): This comes on top of a situation that most sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses already face, where the individual transaction costs that they are paid for are actually more than the money they are given from the Post Office. Does that not make the bleak scenario that my hon. Friend outlines look rather inevitable?

Jamie Stone: My right hon. Friend represents the furthest constituency—even further away than mine—so he indeed knows what he is talking about.

Money is lost. There are, however, other ways to ensure the sustainability of rural post offices. We have heard how we can do this from the numerous interventions, for which I thank all hon. and right hon. Members.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and for tabling this important debate. There has been an issue in my constituency—which I think can be described as semi-rural—with the post office in Darfield regularly not opening. I am hopeful that we will have a solution, and perhaps the Minister can pick up on this, because it has been tricky to get the Post Office to act when there have been regular closures. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it has a real impact when residents cannot access the post office due to regular closures and the travel time is not sustainable?

Jamie Stone: I will say in passing that I am very considerably encouraged by the number of interventions. It leaves me in very good heart.

Jim Shannon: There are more to come. [*Laughter.*]

Jamie Stone: Perhaps I asked for that one.

As I said, there are ways of keeping the post offices open. Getting rid of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency services is absolutely not one of them.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On that note, the withdrawal of DVLA services, due to take place in March next year, is abominable, and will further cut the amount that sub-postmasters can earn. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should invest in the future of the rural network, pay sub-postmasters enough to allow them to continue providing their vital services to local communities, and get more business into these vital outlets for rural communities?

Jamie Stone: The hon. Lady makes an extremely good intervention.

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Jamie Stone: Goodness me! With pleasure.

Sarah Dyke: This is an extremely important debate and I am very pleased that my hon. Friend has tabled it. I have met with several postmasters in Frome and Martock, in my constituency. They are worried that from 31 March next year, people will be unable to access DVLA services from Post Office branches. Currently those branches carry out 6 million DVLA transactions a year. I know that the range of services offered by the post offices in Frome and Martock are essential to many residents. Does he agree that we need to recognise the regrettable impact that the loss of in-person services at Post Office branches will have on our rural communities?

Jamie Stone: Indeed I do agree. If we look at this historically, the Royal Mail post office network was one of the proudest achievements of the 19th century: it made this country what it is. One last point on the DVLA—some 6 million people use the post office network for accessing DVLA services each year. That increases the vital footfall to local branches which helps to pay our postmasters, and keeps our post offices open. I call on the Government to look again at this decision to take away this function.

Finally, to conclude—[*Interruption.*] I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He would know that I would want to say something, being a former postmaster myself. There is a glaring hole on our high streets as our banks leave at an ever growing rate. The Post Office does a fantastic job, as we know. Why can it not be given the tools to roll out banking hubs up and down our high streets? Not only would this be a fantastic additional service to the post office network, but it would also help postmasters—who could perhaps run them—receive valuable additional revenue.

Jamie Stone: Again, wise words.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab) *rose*—

Jamie Stone: I sense another intervention coming.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. In Llanmadoc—in my constituency—the post office is located in a community shop that also serves as a meeting space for local groups. After the closure of the old shop 20 years ago, the community and volunteers got together to make that happen. The post office benefits hugely from being in this hub now, and it also benefits the tourists that come to Gower. Will the hon. Gentleman agree that post offices such as the one in Llanmadoc are vital to our rural communities, and will he join me in thanking the volunteers and people in these rural communities determined to make those services work for everybody?

Jamie Stone: That is absolutely correct. I think we are all saying that any Government, of any colour—be it the Scottish Government, or Westminster—has a responsibility to remote communities. It is of course for Royal Mail and the Post Office to try and work together, and perhaps also—as others have said—local councils and other organisations, to make this work.

The bottom line is that I do not want to see posties on the north coast of Sutherland having to swap parcels and letters between their vans in the rain and I do not want them searching for a loo that is probably closed. We can do things so much better. As I have said already, I am extremely grateful for the thoughtful and helpful interventions that I have taken this afternoon.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): It is a pleasure, Mr Hosie, to speak with you in the Chair. I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) on securing this important debate on a subject close to my heart, as a rural MP.

The post office network plays a unique and vital role as part of the UK postal system. Although consumers have more choice than ever when it comes to purchasing postal products, many still turn to bricks-and-mortar post offices. As the hon. Member rightly said, post offices are part of the social fabric of our communities.

There are currently over 6,000 rural branches, which constitute 54% of the total post office network. Over 3,000 of those rural branches are described as the last shop in the village. Recent research highlights how vital these branches are. They enable people to access vital services without needing to drive or use public transport. They are particularly cherished by older people and those who might struggle to travel far to access services. In my constituency we have lots of bus passes but not many buses, so it is very important that those rural post offices exist, as they are also integral to businesses operating in rural areas because of their important role in providing access to cash.

Cash being the word, the Government have provided significant financial support to sustain the network nationally, adding up to more than £2.5 billion over the last 10 years. The Government are providing a further

£335 million for the Post Office for the period between 2022 and 2025. As part of that support, the Government have committed to maintaining the annual £50 million subsidy to safeguard services in the uncommercial parts of the network until 2025.

The Government protect the sustainability of the branch network, and the rural network in particular, by providing funding on the basis that the Post Office meets its minimum access criteria, to ensure that across the country 99% of the population live within 3 miles of their nearest post office, as the hon. Member referred to. The Post Office meets its access criteria obligations nationally, making it the largest retail network in the UK with an unrivalled reach, especially in rural areas. Indeed, in 2022 98% of the rural population lived within 3 miles of their nearest branch.

The Government remain committed to the long-term sustainability of the Post Office, but we have to recognise that there is not a bottomless pit of money. Of course, with a network of this size, we are likely to see a fluctuation in the number of branches that are open at any one time. However, the network is certainly not in decline at a national level. As its chief executive officer recently confirmed, the network is as large today as it has been for five years, with around 11,700 branches open.

Marion Fellows: The count of the number of post offices includes drop and go facilities. Those are not in any sense post offices, as all Members here would recognise them. Does the Minister think that is fair?

Kevin Hollinrake: Drop and go branches perform an important service, as do mobile post offices, of course. However, there is no doubt that there are challenges in maintaining the size of the network, which I will come to shortly. Of course this is public money that we are spending, so we must ensure that it is spent well, while being appropriate to the need locally, particularly in rural areas.

The percentage of the network serving rural communities has remained steady at 53% since 2016. We appreciate that it is very challenging for communities that lose their post office service and the Post Office endeavours to restore services as quickly as possible.

Tim Farron: The Minister is a good man; I am very grateful to him for being so generous, indeed super-generous, to my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) earlier.

The thing about individual post offices is that I can think of a couple of villages in Westmorland and Furness—Hawkshead and Shap—that have lost their post office and where Post Office Ltd. is working hard to restore them. Will he pay particular attention to those communities to make sure that we get those replacements over the line, because we are all but done with getting them back on the street and back open?

Kevin Hollinrake: We are very happy to take up any particular issue that Members raise, as we do regularly through correspondence and other measures. Where there are closures of post offices, we will endeavour to reopen them, but that can be challenging. However, if there is a particular issue, I am very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss it.

Patricia Gibson: Does the Minister think there is a case for giving greater UK Government support to rural post offices, which, by definition, cannot compete on footfall because they serve smaller populations, so that our island and rural communities can keep hold of our post offices, even during these difficult times?

Kevin Hollinrake: As I said earlier, I am bound to stand up for rural areas, just like the hon. Lady and others in this debate, but there is a limit to taxpayers' money, and we are talking about £2.5 billion over 10 years and significant funding requirements now, in terms of the needs of both the network and the compensation schemes, which I will refer to in a second. We do not have a bottomless pit of money. However, there are other measures we can take, which I will mention, to make the Post Office sustainable and make individual branches profitable, which is the key to this conversation.

Returning to specific branches, I am glad that the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross referenced the Balintore post office, which reopened at the Seaboard Memorial Hall last year, thanks to the efforts of the post office and the hall's committee, and indeed Maureen, the postmaster. However, we are in no way trying to pretend that the rural network is not facing challenges—not at all. As I have said before, the Post Office works with communities to ensure that services are maintained, and the Government's access criteria ensure that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) rightly references post boxes, which are another key part of this matter. Royal Mail is there to ensure that there is a post box within half a mile of the premises of at least 98% of users of postal services. If that is not the case, I am very happy to engage with my hon. Friend to get answers for him and change in his local area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) challenges the Government on what more we can do to ensure the sustainability of post offices. It is important we take into account that many of the challenges facing post offices are because of the changes in consumer habits—just like the rest of the high street, which is seeing those changes too. That is also related to Government services such as driving licences, passports and other similar services, mentioned by the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), who does a fantastic job as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on post offices. Many consumers now want to access such services online, which can be done very efficiently. I do not think it is for us to dictate to those citizens how they access those kinds of services if they can do so more quickly and efficiently online. That would be the wrong thing to do.

Marion Fellows: The Government will be dictating to our constituents how they access those services if they are withdrawn from post offices, because digitally excluded people will not be able to use them online.

Kevin Hollinrake: If that was what the Government were doing, that would be something the hon. Lady could hold us to account for, but that is not the case. There is a clear negotiation between different Government Departments over the cost of providing those services,

with negotiations between the passport service, the DVLA and the post office network itself. I very much hope there is a good commercial relationship that properly remunerates postmasters for the work they do, which is key.

As I say, there has been a diminution of hundreds of millions of pounds in revenue into the post office network because of the change in consumer habits, so we need to find ways to make the network sustainable in its own right. We do not have a bottomless pit of money. We are talking about £2.5 billion over 10 years. This year, the UK economy deficit in terms of public spending, expenditure and income will be about £140 billion.

The hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Keir Mather), whom I welcome—this is the first time I have responded to him in a debate—challenges us to do more and provide more funding. There are challenges with that. To govern is to choose, so we have to be careful how we spend taxpayers' money. Nevertheless, we want to make sure that the post office network is sustainable in its own right, wherever possible, to ease the burden on the taxpayer. We are, of course, determined to retain the network wherever possible and to find ways to do that.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) rightly raises the issue of the banking framework. This is a relationship between banks and post offices, in terms of how post offices are remunerated for providing many of the services banks used to provide when they had branch networks across the country. Since 2015, there have been 5,500 bank closures—at the last count—across the network and collectively across the different high street brands. That saves those banks somewhere in the region of £2.5 billion to £3 billion a year.

We are very keen for the Post Office, in its negotiations with the banks via UK Finance or other means of negotiation, to get a better deal and better remuneration from that relationship. Increases in remuneration should go, wherever possible, into the branch network or into automation to make those branches work more efficiently, so that they can be more profitable. A key thing that we would like to see is a fairer relationship, which shares some of the savings banks are making from the closing of their branches with the network that is providing those services since their closure. While we want to see access to post office services retained for our communities, we also want things like access to cash, both in terms of dispensing cash and cash deposits. That is vital, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, and for the 2 million people in this country that do not have a bank account and the 8 million people who use cash every single week.

Jamie Stone: At the beginning of my contribution, I outlined the success story that is the work of Councillor Maureen Ross to establish a post office in Balintore. I know from having talked to the good lady that she is thinking of increasing the opening hours and has thoughts on banking, as we have no bank branches in the villages at all. I suggest to the Minister that it might be constructive if perhaps some officials from his Department went up there and talked to Councillor Ross, and saw what a good idea that would be.

Kevin Hollinrake: I would be very happy to visit if I find myself in that part of the world. It is quite a way away from even my constituency, but Maureen obviously

does a fantastic job for the hon. Gentleman and his community, and we are keen to support those efforts. I am very happy to facilitate a conversation to ensure that Maureen has the best opportunity to make her business as viable as possible.

The Government are also funding the cost of the replacement of the Horizon IT platform that caused so many difficulties. Again, we hope that will provide new opportunities too, both in terms of efficiency and new services. We see post offices becoming parcel hubs, and the Post Office sees that as an opportunity to be frequented not just by custom from Royal Mail but also DHL, DPD, Amazon and other providers. There are future revenue opportunities that we should encourage to ensure that the network is sustainable.

Briefly on Horizon, last week's written ministerial statement announced our intention to provide additional financial support to the Post Office as it continues to respond to the Horizon IT scandal. That is further proof of our commitment to the network.

There are certainly challenges ahead, but we continue to work with the Post Office to ensure that it is fit for the future, and we always welcome views from across the House on the network and how we make it sustainable for the future. I therefore once again thank the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross for securing today's important debate, and thank all other Members for their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

Government Support for a Circular Economy

4.30 pm

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for a circular economy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which is a leading non-governmental organisation on the topic, the circular economy is

“a system where materials never become waste”

and the natural environment is able to regenerate, and in which

“products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting.”

The sustainable and regenerative system that it creates is one in which economic growth is decoupled from our resource consumption.

I hope to make it clear that there are economic opportunities to be derived from a more circular economy. It is great example of the environment and the economy going hand in hand, rather than being pitted against one another as competing and conflicting aims. The approach runs counter to the linear “take, make and dispose” approach to resource consumption to which we have become accustomed.

To illustrate the status quo, imagine a single-use plastic bottle of water. The bottle takes approximately five seconds to produce in a factory. It is transported to a shop for someone to buy, and it takes around five minutes to drink, at which point it is put in the bin. Having taken just five seconds to produce and five minutes to consume, the plastic bottle can then stay in our environment for 500 years. Even then—as I have been cautioned by the founder and lead member of Plastic Free Eastbourne, who is a modest local hero—the journey does not end there. Every piece of plastic that we have ever produced is still with us somewhere. When a plastic bottle eventually starts to degrade, it does not simply disappear; it breaks down into smaller parts—microplastics and even nanoplastics.

That is one of the reasons for the campaign to roll out refillable water bottles, which hon. Members will see if they visit my fair constituency of Eastbourne. The first refillable water bottle station, which I had the great privilege to attend back in the time between lockdowns, was introduced in 2021. That one refill station has now sprung to 14, and a further five are in the pipeline, so that people can return again and again to fill their bottles, in their own circular economy.

Plastic bottles are still in production in their millions, and we pay for the convenience, perhaps without thinking about the inevitable hidden costs to our environment. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has undertaken hugely important work in order to make strides in this area, and specifically to improve recycling rates in England. As recently as this weekend, DEFRA made important announcements about its reforms for simpler recycling, which will see councils across England providing for the collection of the same set of materials from households, including a weekly food waste collection.

[Caroline Ansell]

There is perhaps a higher calling to that notion of food waste. I met just this week with an enterprise called Too Good to Go. Its app connects local shoppers to local businesses that are anxious to pass on food that would otherwise go to waste. In my constituency alone, 70,000 kg of food—equivalent in its carbon emissions, I am told, to 156 days of constant warm showers—has been saved from landfill.

The recycling reforms do not stop there. I know that the Minister's Department has been working tirelessly to create an extended producer responsibility scheme for packaging that moves the burden of responsibility and payment for waste management from local councils to packaging producers. The scheme will help to ensure that the polluter pays for the packaging legacy that it creates. In doing so, it will encourage innovation and lower packaging use. It will also ensure that all the packaging we use has a clear label stating "recycle" or "do not recycle".

As the Minister will know, last week was Recycling Week 2023. The theme was "the big recycling hunt"—an entire week dedicated to shedding light on the recyclable everyday household items that we do not put in the recycling bin, such as aerosols and plastic cleaning and toiletry bottles. With so many random recycling labels out there, the presence of a standard, recognisable label will remove doubt and help consumers to get it right when they go to the recycling bin.

Another critical aspect of the extended producer responsibility scheme is the modulated fee structure. In theory, that will mean that producers are charged different amounts, paying less for recyclable items than non-recyclable ones. However, I understand that industry is still awaiting the details, meaning that the timeline for roll-out is stretched, and there could be a scenario in which producers are paying into the scheme before the modulated fee structure has been implemented. The modulated fee structure is the key to driving the action we want to see from packaging producers. Could the Minister provide further clarity on the timeline? We need to ensure that we incentivise producers not only correctly but in a sufficiently timely manner for them to deliver change to their packaging.

The third pillar to these packaging reforms is the deposit return scheme for drinks containers. I know that progress on that policy has been fraught due to factors outside of DEFRA's control, but it was an aspiration and ambition raised at Plastic Free Eastbourne's recent water summit. It is considered an important solution, so how do we focus on it? It has worked incredibly well for our European neighbours, albeit less so across the border in Scotland. I understand that there are potentially lessons to be learned from that experience. I would welcome an update from the Minister on the scheme.

Individually and collectively, the reforms will be game changing for our recycling system and help to boost our stubbornly low recycling rates in Eastbourne and across England. In my own council area, the recycling rate sits at 32.8%, which is sadly below the national average of 44% and below next-door Wealden's 48%. I am concerned about the risk that a focus on recycling may overshadow other processes I have referenced, such as reduction,

reuse, refurbishment, re-manufacture and composting, which are all so critical to the creation of a circular economy.

Speaking of composting, let me return briefly to the topic of food waste. It is certainly welcome news that households will now have a weekly food waste collection. Even collecting food waste in its own bin has been shown to reduce the amount of waste created, perhaps by embarrassing people—awkward but true—into cutting their waste. The carbon emissions from food waste are enormous and represent a huge waste of money and food. Processing food waste through composting and anaerobic digestion will help to reduce the emissions that would have been created if it had gone into the general waste bin.

I also want to draw attention to what other countries, such as Italy, are doing with their collection of food waste and compostable plastics. Those plastics are made from bioplastics, which means that, unlike regular plastics, they are not made using fossil fuels and they break down quickly in industrial composting facilities. This challenge—the move from fossil-based plastics to those made from more sustainable and renewable raw materials such as corn and starch—was the subject of a petition by Eastbourne's plastic-free community that garnered 1,446 signatures. This important topic was covered in some depth by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in its report published earlier this year.

I am aware that there are challenges in the transition to bioplastics, including with disposal, the question of one-time use, and the use of land to grow the raw materials. But the march towards the bioeconomy the world over, with ever-increasing uptake and interest in bioplastics, is something that we must surely be watching with keen interest. I understand that the UK does not have as many composting facilities as anaerobic digestion plants, but compostable plastics are increasingly being adopted by businesses that want to do the right thing for the environment.

Compostable plastics are a clear example of the market in action. Recognising the problem posed by single-use plastic waste, companies have invested in research and development, and come up with an innovative tech-driven solution. There are many businesses already operating in this space, and we should surely incentivise them rather than disadvantaging them with a framework that does not recognise the good that their work could represent.

The applications of compostable plastics are broad. I have seen them used in items such as coffee cups, packaging for online clothing deliveries, coffee pods, sauce sachets, tea bags, and—perhaps most relatably—food waste caddy liners. The Government and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation are in agreement that there is a role for compostable plastics in specific applications such as coffee pods and tea bags. In a recent DEFRA consultation on consistency in recycling, 77% of respondents approved of the introduction of compostable caddy liners, a move supported by the Bio-based and Biodegradable Industries Association, but the commentary in the executive summary suggests quite the opposite—that a majority disagreed with that move. Is that something that the Minister could resolve?

I have devoted a lot of time to packaging—I think that reflects both where the general public's interest lies and where DEFRA has taken most steps—but packaging

is only part of the circular economy. The UK throws away 300,000 tonnes of electrical waste from households and businesses each year. That makes us the world's second largest annual contributor of e-waste, averaging a whopping 23.9 kg per person. The idea of fast tech—the disposable use of electronic goods—is gaining prominence among campaigners, and disposable vapes in particular have become a focus. The Government have taken steps to tackle disposable vapes, but the issue is much broader.

To illustrate that, recent research by Material Focus revealed that there are 7.5 million unused electrical children's toys hidden in households across the UK. Even if they do make it out of the cupboard, they do not necessarily go to the right place. Three million toys have been sent to landfill in the past six months alone. That is enough to fill Hamleys' flagship Regent Street store nearly 14 times over—not fun; we have all seen “Toy Story 3”.

I understand that some councils are voluntarily introducing kerbside or communal bins for e-waste collection. Even rolled out at scale, however, will that tackle the problem head on? Do we not need to look further upstream to the design of products and the obligations that we place on their producers?

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for her excellent speech and for bringing this important matter before the House. She is talking about encouraging people to behave a certain way with reusable products, but does she agree that this place could also utilise the tax system more effectively? Take period products: unlike products that cannot be reused, we tax products promoted as “period pants” at 20%. Will she join me in supporting the Marks & Spencer campaign that went to No. 10 yesterday and saying “pants to the tax”?

Caroline Ansell: I thank my hon. Friend for saying “pants to the tax”, and I am happy to confirm that I am 100% behind the campaign. It is a strange and extraordinary anomaly that period pants are classified as a garment, rather than as a period product. I cannot imagine anyone wearing period pants on other days of the month, just for fashion or pleasure, so I 100% subscribe to the campaign. We would be levelling up not only by changing the VAT regime for period pants, but by distinguishing between disposable and reusable. Surely we want to promote reusable in this context. It would be an important incentive because it would give choice, and my understanding is that the leading companies have pledged that the tax difference would be passed on to customers. This is another important way in which we can use the frameworks and levers around VAT and tax, as my hon. Friend said, to help people make the best and wisest decisions. I thank her for mentioning that important campaign.

Some products are more easily reused and repaired than others. A more circular approach in general would be a welcome step up in ambition, but I understand that the Minister is actively engaged through reforms to the waste electrical and electronic equipment regulations. It would be good to hear how those reforms are progressing.

Each year, only 1% of clothes are recycled into new clothes. It has been estimated that one truckload of clothing is landfilled or burned every second globally. On our high streets, charity shops do a fantastic job of

providing access to textile reuse, both for clothing and for sometimes overlooked purposes such as furniture upholstery. Access to charity stores has helped to normalise reuse.

The work of charity shops will only go so far, however, and does not tackle the root cause. Back in 2018, the Government committed to consult on a textile extended producer responsibility scheme, but that has been superseded by other pressing priorities for the Department. However, there was a commitment to help establish the best waste hierarchy in order to better manage textile waste. With the Government target to halve residual waste, we have an incentive to tackle textile waste, but without a clear route to correct disposal, clothes will continue to be sent to landfill and incineration. In the light of that, I wonder what more the Minister might have planned to tackle textile waste.

This might be a Miranda Hart moment: my notes say “lubes”. For the benefit of *Hansard*, however, I might resort to “lubricants”. I wish to make some comments about cross-departmental collaboration. Energy is a resource that we must husband effectively and efficiently. With the UK target to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, we have been made to reassess our relationship with energy and the composition of specific resources that that might require.

Intuitively, we know that a more circular economy is one that uses renewable energy sources. In the south, looking across the downland from Eastbourne, we can see the most glorious vista across the waves to Rampion offshore wind farm, which powers half the homes in Sussex, and there is an ambition for an extension that would take in the whole county. As we continue to adopt renewables at scale, we must make sure that the resources that go into harvesting the energy are sustainable. The topic of blade recyclability is gaining traction, but the sustainability mindset should cover all aspects of the process, right down to whether the lubricants used in the generation of energy are sustainable. If our wind farms made the transition to bio-based lubricants, typically from vegetable oils, that would be very effective. Of course, the UK has abundant bio-based resources, such as rapeseed oil, for producing bio-lubricants.

There are further advantages to the adoption of a bio-based fuel. Bio-based fuels not only extend the life of the machinery, as evidenced by the Eden Project, but have a wider economic and environmental benefit: if they are accidentally discharged into the environment, they are benign compared with petroleum-based lubricants. Although waste and resources as a whole sit with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, wind turbines are a Department for Energy Security and Net Zero matter. It is vital that cross-cutting, cross-Department issues do not fall through the cracks, so I would love to know what work could be undertaken between DEFRA and DESNZ around such issues and challenges. I will take that up with colleagues in DESNZ.

I know that by covering only packaging, electronics, textiles and renewables, I have missed out many other sectors that would benefit from a circular economy, but I hope that I have gone some way towards illustrating the opportunities, and the case for Government support. Business giants such as Currys, Apple, M&S and IKEA have been experimenting with reuse and take-back schemes. Indeed, the likes of eBay stake their entire business model on reuse. I am sporting my latest purchase: my

[Caroline Ansell]

vintage M&S jacket recently procured through eBay. They are joined by a suite of start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises across the country that have put the circular economy at their heart. However, across the board, businesses are concerned that without stronger incentives, we will perhaps not see the leap from small-scale initiatives and trials to mass roll-out.

A circular economy is more efficient. It can save us money and make us money. In short, this is not a hair-shirted environmental mission. There are economic opportunities to be pursued, but after decades of disposability, there is work to be done to ensure that action is aligned with the Government's commitment to creating a more circular economy.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the Front-Bench speakers that in these hour-long debates, the speaking times are five minutes for Opposition Front Benchers and 10 minutes for the Government? I call Andrew Selous.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Can I just check, Mr Hosie, that you did not want to call anyone from the other side of the Chamber first?

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): I apologise. I will happily call Mr Jim Shannon; I did not have his name down.

4.54 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am happy that you are happy to do so, Mr Hosie. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on leading today's debate and setting the scene so very well by giving us an evidential base and information, which is so important. As we approach COP, it is always good to have these discussions, so that we can assess what stage we are at, in terms of product stability and waste management. Throughout the United Kingdom, we all have different strategies for contributing to the circular economy. It is always my intent to give a Northern Ireland perspective. I do it in every debate; I make sure that our position, as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is clear.

It is always a pleasure to see the Minister in her place. I look forward to her response and the solution-based answer that she always gives us. I am also pleased to see the two shadow Ministers in their place, especially the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), who survived Storm Babet. We missed him in the debate here last Thursday, which was on his area of responsibility. It is good to have them both here.

Back home, the Department for the Economy has initiated a draft circular economy strategy for Northern Ireland. It stated:

"We are all experiencing the impact of resource scarcity in the rising cost of living. We know the earth provides an abundant, but finite supply of resources that we are rapidly depleting."

That is a fact of life; that is where we are. This revolution of resources will be an essential part of reducing our emissions, and it will be embedded in climate action plans, and in Northern Ireland's multi-decade green growth strategy.

Our research back home for the strategy has shown that Northern Ireland imports and extracts some 31.5 million tonnes of materials annually. That is the equivalent weight of nearly 16 million cars. It puts into perspective the magnitude of what we are discussing. For a country the size and population of Northern Ireland—we have 1.95 million people—we are consuming a disproportionate amount of the Earth's resources. Clearly, that has to improve. It is estimated that each person in Northern Ireland is consuming some 16.6 tonnes of resources per year.

When I give a Northern Ireland perspective, I like to give an idea of what the council is doing in my constituency. Ards and North Down Council, which covers the area where I both work and reside, has proven committed to acting sustainably to create a vibrant and healthy environment. There is always room for improvement when it comes to meeting our net zero targets and waste management, but recognising the contribution that local councils and smaller devolved institutions can make to the UK is the first major step in regulating sustainability in our environments and products.

Ards Borough Council, or Ards and North Down Council as it is now, has a proactive recycling strategy. It takes away the blue bins, grey bins and black bins, and there are bottle banks as well. Those are all things that we do to try to make recycling more sustainable. However, unfortunately, we have come to a crux in the road: the recycling targets we have set seem to have been achieved, but having had population growth, we do not seem to be doing any more. The council is looking into how it can do better.

In conclusion, although the Minister does not have direct responsibility for Northern Ireland, I know that she engages with the Departments back home and, through the Assembly, directly with the councils. I ask her to consider the contribution that Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can make to circular economies across the United Kingdom. This is not something we can do on our own; I want to get that point across. We cannot do this regionally in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, but we can if we all come together. The good thing about agreeing on the targets and the strategy is that we can ensure that we all benefit. I look forward to engaging on this topic, and perhaps we will revisit it after COP28 this year.

4.59 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this important debate, so ably introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell). Someone said to me recently that when we say, "Throw it away," we need to realise that there is no such place as "away", because everything ends up somewhere. Matter becomes different types of matter. We need to think about our language sometimes, and to have a whole different mindset in this important area.

Today we are talking about reducing waste, reducing cost, conserving nature and making sure that the polluter pays. I think those are principles to which we would all sign up. They are inherently conservative as well, and they are really important. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said, we have to move away from the linear economy of take, make and dispose, and towards

the circular economy of reuse, repair, recycle and remanufacture. I pay tribute to businesses large and small that have been on this journey for a while. I think I first heard the expression “the circular economy” from Unilever. Many businesses get it, and they want a helping and supportive environment from the Government, which I know the Minister will try to provide for them.

We have already had many examples in this debate of items going unnecessarily to landfill, including toys. I was particularly pleased to present a Points of Light award to Charlotte Liebling from Leighton Buzzard in my constituency. She runs the wonderful charity Loved Before, which takes children’s teddies that have been greatly loved and often hugged night after night. When children do not want them anymore, the teddies go to Loved Before. They are sanitised, repaired, repackaged and loved again and again by other children. Charlotte has prevented thousands and thousands of teddies from going to landfill all over the country, and it was a pleasure to present her with her Points of Light award from our former Prime Minister a couple of years ago.

We are in the middle of a cost of living crisis, for reasons with which we are all familiar, and it is important to point out to our constituents that reusing resources and reducing waste can save the average household around £300 a year. That is not an insignificant sum of money for many families, so there is definitely an economic aspect to this, which will help people’s purses and wallets. I am pleased to see that many of our leading companies, such as IKEA, Currys, Primark and Apple, run take-back schemes. It is scandalous that many of us get pressured into replacing our mobile phones after only two years. The mobile phone companies do not upgrade the software, so we are almost forced to replace our phones, but it is good that companies such as Apple now have a proper take-back scheme, so that other people can use those phones, and they do not get wasted.

I was very pleased to see the Government’s announcement on Saturday morning. We have to recognise that recycling rates have plateaued at around 44% in England. They rose for a number of years, but we are not making the progress that we want. The Government have committed to starting a deposit return scheme in the next year or so; to introducing requirements on local authorities to recycle standardised items; and to making recycling labels mandatory. We need a very clear, easy-to-understand guarantee that if a product has the mandatory recycling label on it, people can put it in a recycling bin wherever they are in the country and know that it will get recycled, and they do not have to wonder whether the local authority will recycle it.

Weekly food waste collections are really important. A couple of years ago, I learned that if food waste was a country in its own right, it would have the third highest greenhouse gas emissions on the planet. That is hugely significant. These are very dangerous gases, such as methane, which is particularly bad for the environment, so this is so important. I gently say to some of my constituents, even up and down my road, that I do not always see the food waste bin outside. I make sure that mine goes out every week, because it is part of our civic responsibility to get with the programme if we care about the environment and our planet. That is a bit of gentle encouragement to some of my constituents.

Extended responsibility schemes for packaging are absolutely right, and the Government are right to be committed to the “polluter pays” principle. It should not be the taxpayer who always has to pick up the tab. Those responsible need to raise their game as well.

I welcome the Government’s commitment to the near elimination of biodegradable municipal waste to landfill from 2028. That is excellent. I am also pleased to see the commitment to raising the rate of recycling for municipal waste from 44% to 65% by 2035. I would love that to happen sooner, but let us at least try to meet that target, and get there earlier if we can.

I am also particularly pleased about mandatory digital waste tracking. There are too many fly-tipping cowboy criminals, as I mentioned in my maiden speech over 22 years ago, and we need to crack down on them. Congratulations to Peter Byrne at Central Bedfordshire Council, who has secured a number of convictions on that front recently, which is excellent.

There are a couple of areas where we could do more. There is too much farm food waste; that is food that could be eaten. It is not always easy to deal with; I had a particularly prolific apple tree this year, and I tried to give the apples away, but although I did as much as I could, I am afraid that some were wasted. I peeled, cored, sliced and froze as many as I could. Farmers need help in that area. Textiles have been mentioned, and it is shocking that only 1% are recycled. I would like to do another shout out to my dry cleaner, Met of Four Seasons Dry Cleaners in Dunstable, who has repatched my gardening trousers about 12 times. I keep on wearing them, and that is very good. Also, on electronic items, we have to get away from fast tech. It is also great that the UK was in the lead on the UN global plastics treaty.

Let me finish by saying that it is absolutely shocking that a plastic bottle takes five seconds to make, takes five seconds to drink, and then lasts for 500 years in our environment. We have to do better on that front.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Who on earth would have thought that we would be talking about the hon. Gentleman’s gardening trousers? I call Dave Doogan.

5.7 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): It is a genuine pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I want to touch on a couple of issues that were raised, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) for securing this important debate.

Mr Hosie, in Angus we recycle—and I literally mean “we”: you, I and everyone else in Angus—54.7% of our post-consumer waste. That is to be celebrated, but I am relieved that the SNP administration on Angus Council is not resting on its laurels. In the last budget, it was looking at measures to get that figure even higher. Although I salute the plea from the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for civic responsibility in recycling and disposing more responsibly of food waste, let me gently suggest that a statutory responsibility is far more effective. Scotland has a statutory responsibility on local authorities to collect food waste at the doorstep, and we have used it to good effect.

I think that disposable vapes are universally loathed among parliamentarians. I recently had to replace a tyre after it succumbed to the innards of a disposable vape.

[Dave Doogan]

In this debate, we need to separate the truly pernicious public health element of disposable vapes, which are cynically marketed to children, and focus on the environmental consequences, which are vast and disastrous for us. I understand that the Government are looking at that. Will the Minister update us on what actions are being planned?

I know that we are not allowed to use props in the Chamber, but these water cups are among the products that are marketed as being allegedly biodegradable. Can the Minister update the Chamber on how genuinely biodegradable they are? My understanding is that they are biodegradable in little more than a marketing sense, and that the amount of energy that has to be put into recycling them, supposing that a facility that can recycle them can be found, is truly appalling.

Unlike here in Westminster, the Scottish Government are committed to implementing legislation to ensure a transition to a circular economy, and to support growth in green businesses while cutting waste and climate emissions. However, the UK Government continue to abuse their post-Brexit powers to prevent the Scottish Government from taking action. We saw that after the Scottish Government introduced the Circular Economy Bill to the Scottish Parliament. The Bill will give Ministers powers to set local recycling targets, which is fine; ban the disposal of unsold consumer goods; and place charges on single-use items. On that last provision, the Scottish Government went further and legislated for a deposit return scheme, which was due to go live in August '23, until the malign last-minute intervention of the United Kingdom Government. They unilaterally halted Scotland's ambitions until October '25 at the earliest, and held Scotland back to keep us in line with England. A partnership of equals? I think not!

The European Commission adopted a new circular economy plan in March 2020. Europe is marching on ahead. Thirteen countries have a deposit returns scheme. It is entirely unremarkable on the continent and Scotland would be among that number were we not shackled to this failing Westminster system. A transition to a circular economy is crucial to our fight against climate change. We must remain committed to shifting away from a disposable economy. I am struck by hon. Members talking about throwing away. Away where? It does not go anywhere. It stays with us. We must remain committed to that priority. Our society should be based on the principles of recycling and reusing, and that should be achieved through deeds, not words.

I am saddened that the UK Government exposed their deep-seated—and justifiable—insecurity by preventing Scotland from following through on their legislation in this entirely devolved area, solely to show who is in charge and to mask their own legislative inaction. A shift towards a circular economy would also deliver reductions in energy consumption, which should be a priority alongside green power, but is not—not here in the UK, anyway. A transition to a circular economy could deliver significant gains for industry and generate savings, as others have already evidenced, for households and businesses alike.

The Scottish Government have been working to implement legislation to drive and create a circular economy, which would support the growth of green businesses.

The deposit returns scheme was a significant part of that. When the Scottish Government were prevented by Westminster from introducing the DRS, Westminster blocked an issue that had cross-party consensus in a devolved area. Consider this contrast: when the Scottish Government disagree with the UK Government, we can decline to provide legislative consent; when Westminster decides that it disagrees with Scottish Government legislation, it blocks it. A Union of equals? I do not think so. We in the Scottish Government are committed to furthering the ambitions of environmental protection and renewal, and that is how we will continue.

5.12 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I first offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing this important debate. She made so many important points during her opening speech, which we obviously all listened to with great interest and agreement.

It feels as though we have been talking about circular economics for a long time, but we seem to be going backwards in some areas when it comes to action. It is estimated that there are enough unused cables in UK households to go around the world five times, alongside a hoard of 20 unused electronic items in every household across the UK, yet electronic manufacturers and online retailers do little or nothing to stem the flow of more and more. It does not seem to occur to them at the design stage to even think about making a product durable, reusable, able to be repurposed or built from readily replaceable and upgradable components.

Far too often, products are made with components that will fail and either cannot be repaired or can be fixed only by the original manufacturer. Our economy is stuck in a linear mindset, in which the full costs of environmental impacts are just not factored in. That means high-quality, long-lasting products are undercut by cheap, poor-quality goods that are designed for a single use or a short lifetime.

As ever, there are loads of great initiatives across the UK. In the summer, I had the privilege of spending a day at the Greater Manchester Renewal Hub in Trafford. It is a vast warehouse complex run by SUEZ. It has reuse and repair workshops and is operated by a whole team of community organisations. There are areas for furniture restoring and upcycling, bike repairs, and electrical equipment testing and repairing. Excellent-quality items are resold through the local shops and online. In my constituency of Newport West, our local shop, Remake, hires out products, repairs items and runs classes, including sewing classes, to enable local people to actually repair their own products and give them skills for the future, which is brilliant.

It is clear that we need a proper circular economy action plan, but unfortunately we have a hopelessly piecemeal and hotchpotch system, which is emblematic of the Government's current sticking plaster approach. Even worse, it seems that we now have the Prime Minister trying to turn recycling into a political football. The hon. Members for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned the recycling figures. Certainly, in England they are very low. [Interruption.] I apologise; I meant Angus, not Strangford—I got my countries muddled up. The hon. Member for

Angus (Dave Doogan) made the point about Scotland striving for higher recycling figures. In Wales, the recycling figures are always over 60%, and we are striving for 70%. We are the third best recycling country in the world at the moment and are striving to be second.

Some 80% of the environmental impact of a product is in the design phase, so to prevent waste we have to look at things such as built-in obsolescence and electronic products that are either designed not to be repairable or can be repaired only by the manufacturer. The Government's adviser, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, recommended that Government should support businesses to focus on remanufacturing and repair, which will generate new jobs and tackle structural unemployment. We are also missing a huge opportunity to generate growth and jobs in the economy. Widespread adoption of circular economy business models has the potential to boost the UK economy by around £75 billion in gross value added, according to WRAP. It also believes that moving to a more circular economy, including through recycling, could create around half a million jobs across all skill levels and regions of the UK.

We need a strategy for a circular economy with proper and effective buy-in from the devolved Administrations. That will drive up vital business investment in circular design and reusability. Getting in place the right Government support for a circular economy is a real priority for the next Labour Government.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing this debate, which gives me, as the Minister, the opportunity to talk about so much that is going on in this sphere. I also want to extend a welcome to a gentleman from my hon. Friend's constituency, Mr Sterno, who is here. I believe he is something of a hero locally and has introduced a plastic-free world, basically, in Eastbourne. I congratulate him on that. He also initiated the Spring Water Festival and refillable water stations. He is a model of the kind of constituent we would all welcome. I thank him for all his work and hon. Members and hon. Friends who have taken part.

Natural capital is one of our most valuable assets. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we live on and the stock of material resources that we use in our daily lives are at the heart of our economy, our society and our way of life. We must not take those for granted. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) highlighted that very clearly in his speech. I want to set out the things we are doing in Government. Contrary to what was said by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), and, much as I respect her, we are taking this very seriously and we have a joined-up strategy. She suggested that it was all piecemeal, but I think it will be clear by the end of my speech that that is not the case.

In our 2018 resources and waste strategy for England, we set out how we will preserve that stock of material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving towards the circular economy. The strategy also made clear our intent to minimise the damage caused to our natural environment by waste and to promote clean growth as we move towards

reducing the amount of waste we produce and better handling the waste we generate. The strategy combined immediate actions with firm commitments for the coming years and gave a clear, long-term policy direction in line with our 25-year environment plan, which was refreshed in January this year as our environmental improvement plan. This is our blueprint for eliminating avoidable plastic waste over the lifetime of the plan, for doubling resource productivity and for eliminating avoidable waste of all kinds by 2050—so perhaps I should present a copy of it to the shadow Minister.

I would like to assure my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that my Department remains absolutely committed to these ambitious goals—as I know she is; that was very clear from her speech—and that we have set that out in those publications. Indeed, over the past few years, we have made considerable progress towards realising the aims set out in our plan.

With plastics, we began in 2018 by introducing one of the world's toughest bans on plastic microbeads in rinse-off personal care products. I was just a Back Bencher then—although I should not say “just”—and it is one of the things that I am most proud of being part of, having come to this place. We raised the issue, we gathered the evidence and the data, and the ban was introduced—it happened. That was a huge step forwards.

We followed that in 2020 by restricting the supply of single-use plastic straws and cotton buds, and by banning single-use drink stirrers. From 1 October this year, we have restricted the supply of single-use plastic plates, bowls and trays, and banned single-use plastic cutlery, balloon sticks, and expanded and foam extruded polystyrene food and drink containers—the sort of bubbly or crackly ones. Furthermore, we also increased the carrier bag charge to 10p and extended it to all businesses back in May 2021. That has reduced carrier bag sales across the main retailers by an incredible 98%.

In addition to our domestic progress on plastic, the UK has shown real international leadership in tackling plastic pollution, which was mentioned earlier by a few hon. Friends. We are continuing to deliver international UK aid programmes through our blue planet fund. I was fortunate enough to go to Colombia in the summer and I launched a £10 million programme working with Colombia. Some of Colombia's beautiful islands, beautiful as they are, are being completely weighed down by the weight of plastic and the lack of recycling. Terrible damage can also be seen in the ocean there. Our money is helping with education and work programmes to tackle all those things. I was genuinely so proud to see what we are doing and the lead we are taking on this.

Significantly, we are also co-sponsoring the proposal to prepare the landmark and legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution, which is absolutely critical. The UK is also a founding member of the High Ambition Coalition to end plastic pollution, which is a group of 50 countries calling for strong global obligations and targets, including the goal of ending plastic pollution by 2040. We hope that the eventual instrument—this is happening really quickly—will include obligations relating to the whole lifecycle of plastic, from production to consumption, right through to the environmentally sound management of waste, to create a legal framework for reducing the total quantity of plastic on the planet that goes out on to the market, and to set a really clear road map for that.

[Rebecca Pow]

However, I always say, even when I go out on the international stage, that we have to take the lead at home. We have to demonstrate. We cannot tell other people what to do; we have to be doing it here, and I think everybody in the Chamber clearly feels the same.

Beyond plastic pollution, we are overhauling our whole approach to recycling and packaging waste. The collections and packaging reforms programme comprises a number of schemes. We have the extended producer responsibility scheme for packaging, known as the EPR, which, as has been pointed out, is very much based on the “polluter pays” principle. We also have the deposit return scheme for drinks containers, known as the DRS, and simpler recycling, formerly known as the consistency in recycling collection scheme—we have simplified the whole thing, including the name. Together, the reforms will make up three of the most significant commitments in our resources and waste strategy, and they will play a really key part in delivering our goals for the environment. These reforms will also drive clean growth and reduce the amount of waste that we generate.

Ruth Jones: Although the EPR and the DRS are laudable schemes, does the Minister agree that they seem to have hit the buffers? They have been delayed, and although we have had consultations, we are a long way down the line, yet nothing has happened so far. Does she agree that consistent recycling has also been a long time coming and that it should not be a political football?

Rebecca Pow: The hon. Lady will not be surprised that I completely disagree with her. All these schemes are aligning. Maybe she has not been listening to the recent announcements about all the things coming down the track, and maybe she does not have a complete understanding of how all these schemes will dovetail together. It is so important that we listen to business and to industry, so that we make these schemes work for everyone.

Dave Doogan: The Minister is gently pushing back against the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), about the perceived lack of commitment from the UK Government. It is my understanding that the Conservative party’s 2019 manifesto contained a commitment to DRS, which included glass. Can the Minister confirm that that target has now slipped to 2025? There is a very good chance that, putting it mildly, they might not be in government in 2025.

Rebecca Pow: The Scottish spokesperson raised the whole subject of the DRS in his speech. I was disappointed at the approach he has taken, because my officials and I are at pains to be working so closely with all the devolveds on this, particularly Scotland, in the light of what happened with its deposit return scheme. Just this morning I had a meeting with business and industry. The key things they want are good relations and interoperability of the schemes. That is partly why we moved our EPR by one year, because we listen to business and industry, and they asked us for more time. These things are really complicated for our businesses to roll out, and we have to ensure that they work and will deliver what they are there for.

Absolute alignment is what would work best for all these schemes to achieve what I think we all want, and that is what we are working on with all our devolved

counterparts. It would be brilliant if the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Newport West, could help that along in Wales, and if our SNP colleague, the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), could help us along in Scotland—generally, we always get great support from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). That is something on which we could really work together strongly to help with this.

The overall objectives of our packaging scheme are to encourage businesses to consider how much packaging they use, to design and to use packaging that is more easily recyclable, and to encourage the use of reusable and refillable packaging—I have brought along my refillable water bottle, which is something we could all be doing, although I see that the shadow Minister has not brought along hers.

We have committed to setting ambitious new packaging waste recycling targets for producers, and the packaging EPR policy measures will be key in delivering these. The data already being gathered by the businesses will inform what the fees will be, and that money will be used to pay for the simpler recycling collection. It is all circular. The more recyclable the packaging the producer puts on the market, the lower the fee it will pay. That will drive the design, reusability and recyclability of the product. This is genuinely very exciting, and there are huge opportunities for business, industry and innovation, which some colleagues have referred to.

The deposit return scheme will help to boost recycling levels, just as the EPR will, and to reduce littering, which was one of the main reasons we wanted to bring in that particular scheme. As has been mentioned, the simpler recycling details have now been launched. They are very flexible. We have worked with local authorities so that they know there will be something they can work with. They can put all the dry recyclables into one bag if they wish to, and the food waste will be separately collected. That will be mandatory. As has been pointed out, this is one of the biggest contributors to our emissions. DEFRA’s biggest emissions contribution is food waste, so we must collect it. It is absolutely right that we are going to make that mandatory.

Andrew Selous: Very briefly, can the Minister confirm that, in the main, the local authorities that recycle the most have only three bins?

Rebecca Pow: Three bins is one possible direction. If a council still wanted to separate out all the products, as mine does in Somerset—if that works, because it has the systems and knows it can get the onward market right—then that is fine. But if it wants to put all those dry things into one bin, it can. It will then end up with three bins: that one, one for food waste and the big one for general waste that it is simply very hard to recycle, which will tend to go to incineration to create energy. But the worst thing is landfill, which is what we are trying to eliminate altogether.

We are also honouring our existing commitments to waste prevention, which is really important. So for England, maximising resources—

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 25 October 2023

EDUCATION

The following are extracts from Education questions on 23 October 2023.

Students: Cost of Living

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help support students with the cost of living. [906624]

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help support students with the cost of living. [906632]

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): This year and last year, the Government have provided £94 billion of cost of living support **in England**. In education, more than a third of children get free school meals. University tuition fees have been frozen and we have provided £276 million of student premium to help the most disadvantaged students. [Official Report, 23 October 2023, Vol. 738, c. 571.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon):

Errors have been identified in my response to the hon. Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). The correct response should have been:

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): This year and last year, the Government have provided £94 billion of cost of living support. **In schools**, more than a third of children get free school meals. University tuition fees have been frozen and we have provided £276 million of student premium to help the most disadvantaged students.

Lilian Greenwood: While the cost of food, heating and rent has rocketed, the value of the student maintenance loan has fallen by £1,500 in real terms since 2020-21. Recent research by the University of Nottingham Students' Union revealed that the cost of living crisis is affecting students' education, and their physical and mental health. It found that almost one in 10 students had a weekly budget of £20 or less after rent, and one in five had a weekly budget of £20 or less after rent and bills. Thirty-seven per cent had considered leaving university because of the difficulties they faced paying for essentials. Does the Minister think that these are acceptable conditions for students to be struggling under?

Robert Halfon: It is precisely because of the figures the hon. Lady sets out that we are helping students, with £276 million to try to ensure we help the most disadvantaged students. Her own university—she mentioned Nottingham University—gives a £1,000 bursary to disadvantaged students. We are also giving up to £90 billion of extra help to disadvantaged families, we have frozen tuition fees and we look at loan repayments if family incomes fall below 15%, so we are doing everything possible to support the most disadvantaged to get higher education.

[Official Report, 23 October 2023, Vol. 738, c. 572.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon):

Errors have been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). The correct response should have been:

Robert Halfon: It is precisely because of the figures the hon. Lady sets out that we are helping students, with £276 million to try to ensure we help the most disadvantaged students. Her own university—she mentioned Nottingham University—gives a £1,000 bursary to disadvantaged students. We are also giving up to £90 billion of extra help to disadvantaged families, we have frozen tuition fees and we look at **maintenance loan repayments** if family incomes **fall by at least 15%**, so we are doing everything possible to support the most disadvantaged to get higher education.

SEND Provision

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The SEND crisis extends to Devon, and my postbag is full of correspondence from parents trying to get their children the educational provision they need. It has got so bad that in some cases children are being taught in school cupboards, and Devon has appointed a SEND champion to its cabinet. What steps is the Department taking to help boost SEND services in rural areas such as mine?

David Johnston: There has been a 30% increase in the per-head funding to schools in Devon for their special educational needs provision, and the whole thrust of our reform plan is to make the system work better for parents and families and get the support for their children at the stage when they need it.

[Official Report, 23 October 2023, Vol. 738, c. 577.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage (David Johnston):

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord). The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: There has been a 30% increase in the per-head funding to schools in Devon for their special educational needs provision **between 2021-22 and 2024-25**, and the whole thrust of our reform plan is to make the system work better for parents and families and get the support for their children at the stage when they need it.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): “Lose, lose, lose”, costing a “fortune” and not providing “the right service”. Those are not my words but those of the Secretary of State describing the SEND system over which her Government have been presiding for the last 13 years. Will the Minister tell the House when he expects the plans that the Government have announced for SEND to make a difference to the long waiting times and lack of support experienced by so many families across the country?

David Johnston: We have already begun the reform programme and have just launched the nine SEND change partnerships, which are already starting to make a difference to the provision. I would just say to the hon. Lady that this is yet another area where the Labour party has absolutely no policies whatsoever.

[Official Report, 23 October 2023, Vol. 738, c. 577.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage (David Johnston).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) during Education questions. The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: We have already begun the reform programme and have just launched the nine SEND change partnerships, **which will soon start to make a difference** to the provision. I would just say to the hon. Lady that this is yet another area where the Labour party has absolutely no policies whatsoever.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Towns Fund: Project Delivery

The following is an extract from Levelling Up, Housing and Communities questions on 16 October 2023.

8. **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to help ensure the delivery of projects supported by the Towns Fund. [906516]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): We are supporting 101 towns through our £6.1 billion towns fund, helping to level up across the country. I thank my hon. Friend for all his efforts locally in ensuring that the £25 million Dewsbury town deal delivers the positive outcomes that we all wish to see for his constituents.

[Official Report, 16 October 2023, Vol. 738, c. 9.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young):

An error has been identified in the response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood). The correct response should have been:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): We are supporting 101 towns through our **£3.6 billion towns fund**, helping to level up across the country. I thank my hon. Friend for all his efforts locally in ensuring that the £25 million Dewsbury town deal delivers the positive outcomes that we all wish to see for his constituents.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 25 October 2023

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| PRIME MINISTER | 822 | WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—continued | |
| Engagements | 822 | LGBT People | 816 |
| WOMEN AND EQUALITIES | 813 | Pay Inequalities | 818 |
| Candidate Diversity: Democratic Process | 813 | Single-sex Spaces | 813 |
| Disabled People: Additional Costs | 819 | Topical Questions | 820 |
| | | Women in STEM Jobs | 815 |

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Wednesday 25 October 2023

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| EDUCATION | 5MC | LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND | |
| SEND Provision | 6MC | COMMUNITIES | 7MC |
| Students: Cost of Living | 5MC | Towns Fund: Project Delivery | 7MC |

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Wednesday 1 November 2023**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 25 October 2023

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 813] [see index inside back page]

Minister for Women and Equalities
Prime Minister

Register of Derelict Buildings [Col. 835]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Nick Fletcher)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill [Col. 838]

Lords message considered

Non-Domestic Rating Bill [Col. 867]

Programme motion (No. 2)—(Julie Marson)—agreed to
Lords amendments considered

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill [Col. 872]

Programme motion (No. 2)—(Julie Marson)—agreed to
Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Petitions [Col. 936]

International Rail Services: Kent [Col. 939]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Renewable Energy Providers: Planning Considerations [Col. 283WH]

World Arthritis Day [Col. 308WH]

Future of Horseracing [Col. 314WH]

Rural Postal Services: Sustainability [Col. 339WH]

Government Support for a Circular Economy [Col. 348WH]

General Debates

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 5MC]
