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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Friday 24 January 2025

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Standing Order No. 3).

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163).

A Division was called.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Division off.

Question negatived.

Climate and Nature Bill

Second Reading

9.37 am

Dr Roz Savage (South Cotswolds) (LD): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Climate and Nature Bill has been four years in the making. The enormous amount of support that it has garnered from campaigners, trade unions, scientists, faith leaders, non-governmental organisations, businesses and especially young people means that it is both an honour and an enormous responsibility to set out what it entails, what it adds to existing law and why I believe it addresses the most important existential challenge of our generation: the intertwined climate and nature crises.

This country has signed up to various international commitments, but we still have work to do to fully connect them to real and measurable action. We need to close the ambition gap between what is needed and what is promised, and the delivery gap between what is promised and what is actually happening. That is what the Bill aims to do, because too many metrics are still heading in the wrong direction.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is important, as the hon. Lady has underlined, that we move forward together. She has not mentioned the National Farmers Union. Can she reassure me and others in the House that the National Farmers Union, and the Ulster Farmers Union in Northern Ireland, are happy with the Bill and accept the impact that its proposals will have on them?

Dr Savage: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I would be delighted to have that conversation with representatives of the NFU in Northern Ireland and to reassure them on that point.

As an environmental campaigner for the past 22 years, it has sometimes been easy for me to fall into doomism. Wild fires have ravaged Los Angeles, floods have devastated Valencia and the recently elected leader of the free world is urging us to “drill, baby, drill” in the name of making America great again, but I do not believe that

doomism is helpful. Yes, the best time to take bold action on climate and nature would have been 50 years ago, but the second best time is now.

The Bill is very ambitious for a private Member's Bill, but not ambitious enough for a climate and nature Bill. It is not trying to be over-ambitious or pretending to be a silver bullet, but it aspires to answer the question: from where we are now, what is the right next step to take? The Bill's guiding principle is that we have a duty to be good ancestors. Now that we know what we know about the impact that human activity is having on the liveability of our planet, how do we strike the right balance between present and future thriving? How do we ensure that we are not stealing health, wealth and wellbeing from generations not yet born? While we enrich our lives, how do we ensure we do not impoverish future lives? What do we want our legacy to be—a world with a strip mine next to a rubbish tip next to a shopping mall, or a world with clean air and drinkable rivers, regenerated soils and vibrant oceans, teeming with wildlife and alive with birdsong?

As I speak, I am looking around to spot my three young friends in the Gallery—Polly, Amber and Bobby from Gloucestershire youth climate group. I spoke to the group recently and, by chance, bumped into them on the train into London this morning. When I was their age, I was blissfully ignorant of the looming environmental crisis: they do not have that luxury. They, and the rest of their generation, will face the consequences of our choice here today. I want to be able to look into their eyes after today's debate and feel proud that this House rose to the challenge, that we did what was necessary, rather than what was politically expedient, and that we pledged to protect their future.

What is in the Climate and Nature Bill? The Bill has been drafted by world-leading climate scientists, ecologists and conservationists, and aims to deliver an integrated plan to tackle the twin climate and nature crises. It would bring massive benefits for local communities, including my constituents in the South Cotswolds: improving the air we breathe; giving us clean water to drink, swim and row in; revitalising local populations of cherished wildlife, such as voles, otters, kingfishers and shrews; and providing cheap energy bills, warmer homes, green jobs, better food and happier lives.

The Bill would create a joined-up strategy for the UK to tackle the interconnected climate and nature crises together. It is the only proposed or actual piece of legislation to create the link between the UK's responses to climate change and nature loss. We cannot solve one without tackling the other. We risk making each crisis worse if they are tackled in silos, so the Bill supports a whole-of-Government approach to prevent the issues becoming siloed. Everything in nature is connected with everything else in nature, but sadly not everything in Government is connected with everything else in Government, but it needs to be. Housing, transport and even health are inter-related with climate and nature, so we need a strategy that transcends departmental boundaries.

The CAN Bill would enshrine international commitments made by the UK into national legislation to cut emissions and to restore nature by 2030, as outlined in the global biodiversity framework. The Bill would bring the UK public along with that agenda via a climate and nature

[*Dr Savage*]

assembly, which is key to ensuring that all voices from across our country are heard, enabling workers to transition to low-carbon jobs and ensuring vulnerable communities are protected. It provides for a fair and just transition that does not come at the expense of the rest of the world. For centuries Britain prospered by exploiting resources overseas: animal, vegetable, mineral and human. The Bill requires the accounting for our environmental footprint to be honest, taking into account the carbon emissions and impacts on nature that are incurred overseas in producing the goods and services that we enjoy. It is disingenuous to offshore most of our manufacturing, and then congratulate ourselves for having reduced our environmental impact.

I am delighted to say that the Bill has a long history of being supported by the party now in government. I trust that their ecological concern while in opposition has survived their transition into power, as they are now in a position to act on their pledges. Labour Members may try to tell us that His Majesty's Government are already doing everything that is in the Bill, but looking at the metrics, we are still far adrift of where we need to be. Ultimately, our future will not be determined by our strategies and intentions—nature cares only about results.

The Office for Environmental Protection recently published its progress report on the Government's environmental improvement plan. It found that the Government are largely off track in achieving their legal environmental commitments. I acknowledge that this Government have been in power for less than seven months, so I do not hold them entirely responsible for that state of affairs. But I struggle to see how expanding our airports by approving two new runways will help them get back on track. The OEP assessment shows that on their current trajectory the Government will meet only four of their 40 environmental targets.

The "State of Nature" report 2023 showed that nearly one in six species are at risk of being lost from Great Britain, and the UK now has less than half its biodiversity remaining. Out of the wildlife habitats assessed, only one in seven were found to be in good condition. Only one in 14 woodlands and a quarter of peatlands were in good ecological state. None of the seafloor around the UK was in good condition. Just 44% of woodland is sustainably managed, and only half of fish stocks are sustainably harvested.

It is my view that the Government need to prioritise three things. The first is support for nature-friendly farming. Around 70% of land in England is used for agriculture. Supporting farmers to manage their land in a nature-friendly way will deliver significant environmental improvement at scale.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): The key stewards of our landscape for hundreds of years have been our farmers: no one has done more to make our countryside as beautiful as it is or has a bigger stake in protecting its health for the future. Does my hon. Friend agree that the path to net zero and sustainable local food production lies through our farming community, with the support provided by the Bill? If we are to get the best from our farmers, it is time to use rather more carrots and fewer sticks.

Dr Savage: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. Reports by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs show that nature-friendly farming schemes can be a major pathway for first halting, and then reversing, the decline in species abundance, as well as delivering the majority of habitat creation needed to meet the UK Government's nature and climate targets.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, and I congratulate her on bringing forward this important legislation. Like many farms in Glastonbury and Somerton, Camel Hill farm's focus on regenerative farming has improved soil quality and nature loss. However, the farming budget has seen a real-term funding cut after inflation since 2007, leaving farmers trying to restore nature with reduced support.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If we are to get Members in—we all see how many are present in the Chamber—interventions will have to be short and not pre-prepared speeches. There is plenty of time for those who have put their names down to speak. Members should not use up the time of the hon. Member for South Cotswolds for her opening.

Dr Savage: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and applaud her for her work as an effective spokesperson on behalf of the farming community. Indeed, she pre-empted what I was about to say. Farmers should be properly rewarded for restoring soils, planting hedgerows and reducing pesticide use, with an expanded nature-friendly farming budget at the upcoming comprehensive spending review. They need a clear long-term strategy from the Government so that they are able to plan and invest accordingly.

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this Bill forward. Does she recognise that the sustainable farming incentive is moving to rewarding farmers who are further towards the bottom of the scale, rather than at the high end of it as we would wish to see? To reward farmers for rotation of crops, for example, seems to be going back to the 18th century rather than ensuring a high level of stewardship.

Dr Savage: My understanding, as a non-farmer, is that crop rotation is an effective way to regenerate soil.

The second priority is to create more joined-up space for nature on land. Through the global biodiversity framework, the Government have committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. With less than five years to meet that target, a Wildlife and Countryside Link report states that the amount of land in England effectively protected for nature has fallen to less than 3%. The Government should put 30 by 30 at the heart of upcoming planning reforms, to ensure that all development is playing an active role in nature recovery, and expand the protected sites network by designating more significant and rare natural habitats, such as ancient woodlands and chalk streams.

My third point is about the urgency of delivery, because urgency is lacking in the implementation of positive actions. The OEP states that the rate of tree planting needs to increase substantially to achieve woodland creation goals. Meanwhile, long-awaited major initiatives such as a UK chemicals strategy and land use framework,

and the national action plan on the sustainable use of pesticides, as well as the ban on the sale of horticultural peat and the reintroduction of species such as the beaver, are delayed.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I say a big thank you to the hon. Lady for her excellent speech—this is clearly something that she is passionate about, and has been for a long time. Does she agree that tree planting is hugely important? Trees are part of our biodiversity, but they also give life to us, and I celebrate the work that Harlow council did in planting 5,000 trees across Harlow.

Dr Savage: I applaud the fantastic work being done in Harlow to increase the number of trees. They are indeed life-enhancing and valuable self-contained ecosystems.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for having engaged with me about her Bill. She shared with me the frustrations she has had in discussing its contents with the Government. Can we get to the key issue here? She talks about urgency, but is it true that the Government are intent on kicking the Bill into the long grass because they do not want to be seen to be opposing it, yet they do not really support it?

Dr Savage: That is not my interpretation of the Government's position, and we have had some fruitful conversations.

I shall move on briefly to the climate. While two sectors in climate—power and greenhouse gas removals—are on course to meet or even exceed the required emissions reductions, significant challenges remain in agriculture and land use, transport, and heat and building.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): Some have queried the urgency or indeed the need to reduce emissions from fossil fuels, but does my hon. Friend not agree that, with 250 people in Somerset alone estimated to die early from air pollution according to Public Health England, there are other reasons why we urgently need to reduce carbon emissions?

Dr Savage: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend that we cannot go wrong in moving away from fossil fuels, given the implications for air quality as well as for the climate. I call on the Government to commit significant additional funding to support farmers in environmental delivery on the least productive agricultural land.

Transport has the biggest gap of all sectors between confirmed policy and the emissions reductions needed. We need to improve public transport, reduce bus fares, increase provision for walking and cycling, and decarbonise the freight sector.

Much more needs to be done on buildings and clean heat, too. In the Budget, the Chancellor pledged an initial £3.4 billion towards household energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation, but the current warm homes plan falls short of the pace and scale needed. A strong future homes standard needs to be introduced this year, mandating technologies such as solar photovoltaic, as per the New Homes (Solar Generation) Bill—the sunshine Bill—introduced by my Gloucestershire neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson).

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for what she is doing with the Bill. When talking about the future of housing and properties, we often focus on energy and water. Does she agree that it is important to focus on rainwater harvesting and what can be done in that sense, too?

Dr Savage: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman that the right thing to do is to be much more intelligent in our use of water, which will reduce the demand for clean water and reduce run-off from rainfall, which is becoming increasingly heavy as climate change kicks in.

The most significant addition that the Climate and Nature Bill would make to the existing strategy is its joined-up approach. Of the words in its title, perhaps the most important is “and”. Many people are aware that a changing climate is damaging nature. The wildfires in California this year have claimed millions of trees and thousands of homes. We see expanding deserts, melting ice caps and British moorlands on fire. We see natural cycles getting out of sync, so that newly hatched birds, insects and amphibians no longer find their favourite foods available when they need them.

We are less aware of how the loss of nature, the cutting down of forests, the warming of the oceans and intensive agriculture affect climate. It is a two-way relationship. Forests, oceans and soils are some of our most effective allies for natural carbon capture and sequestration. Healthy soil, along with trees, re-wiggled rivers and water meadows, helps to mitigate flooding and run-off, which are on the increase with ever more intense rainfall. Nature's ability to perform this moderating role and regulate climate is being compromised by the rate at which we are destroying it. We are damaging nature's capacity to self-regulate by killing, reducing, polluting and compromising natural ecosystems. Activities such as deep-sea mining threaten to make extinct species that we have not even discovered yet—species that we may one day find to be enormously useful to humanity.

We often hear that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. “Nature-depleted” is a rather sterile phrase. What does it actually mean? Many of the alarming stats on nature use 1970 as a baseline—just a couple of years after I was born. I remember a time when if we put bread out on the back lawn, within a minute, dozens of starlings would be squabbling over the crusts. I cannot even remember the last time I saw a starling.

Heading off on holidays in my father's Triumph 1200, we would have to stop while he cleaned squashed insects off the windscreen. We do not have to do that any more. We often saw hedgehogs. Okay, they were mostly squashed on the road, because it turns out that a fear response of curling up in a ball is not all that effective when the threat is an oncoming car, but I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House: when did you last see a hedgehog? The collapse in the hedgehog population is not entirely due to roadkill. They lost their habitats, their sources of food and their ability to range and forage as woodlands were cut down and urban gardens were fenced in.

If the first half of my life—perhaps the first two thirds, on a less optimistic estimate—has seen such huge damage inflicted on our natural world, I hope that in the rest of my life I will see nature put well back on

[*Dr Savage*]

the path to recovery. One of my team members is expecting a baby in May, and I would like to commit to Poppy's future daughter that by the time she is five years old we will have halted the degradation of nature and that at least 30% of land and coastal waters will be protected. I would like to promise that unborn little girl that by the time she is 25, we will have reversed nature loss and will be living in harmony with nature, as stated in the global biodiversity framework.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend on behalf of those on the Liberal Democrat Benches for her truly impassioned speech and for her work on the Bill. Chichester harbour has lost 58% of its saltmarsh since 1946—the equivalent of three football pitches every year. Does she agree that that needs to stop today to ensure that that national landscape and site of special scientific interest is protected for generations to come?

Dr Savage: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I know Chichester harbour well and absolutely agree that this is vital work.

There is hope. Nature is enormously resilient and has an amazing capacity to regenerate when we give it a chance. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' appropriately named Hope farm has demonstrated that food production can coexist with benefits to wildlife: breeding bird populations there increased by 177% over a 12-year period. We need to encourage people to get involved—a new kind of land army working together for nature. We need to unlock the local knowledge, energy and passion for nature that I see every day in my constituency of South Cotswolds. I am sure every hon. Member in the Chamber has seen it, regardless of whether their constituency is rural or urban.

One of my especially passionate constituents, Jonathan Whittaker, put together the "Shroud for Nature", an art piece made of 13 double bedsheets covered with heartfelt messages about the Climate and Nature Bill. I have chosen a few of those messages to read out today. They are:

"Care for the planet. Not just for this generation but the next ones. It's your responsibility to make sure I have a home. I am twelve years old."

"We all come from nature, by destroying it we are destroying ourselves."

"When will those in power listen and commit? No nature, no us!"

and

"What you do today will change my life forever."

That is from William, who is 10 years old. They continue:

"We have the solutions; we have the skill. Are we willing to make the change?"

and

"Leave politics aside. Make changes for humankind."

Now we have a little poem dedicated to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

"Secretary of State Steve Reed, do us a good deed"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the hon. Lady is quoting from a poem, but we do not refer

to right hon. and hon. Members by name in the Chamber. Can we please ensure that the courtesies of the House are observed?

Dr Savage: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the poem will no longer rhyme, I shall move on to its second half. It continues:

"Make the powers pay, and make the waters clean for our play."

I had better skip the next quote too, as it refers to the Prime Minister rather too directly. I hope that the next line will not get me into further trouble:

"We blooming elected you! Listen to us!"

To end on a more positive note:

"You have a chance to do something important and good. SO DO IT."

Back on to safer ground, I would like to conclude with a few words about why this Bill matters so much to me personally. After I had my environmental wake-up call 22 years ago, I wanted to find a way to draw attention to my environmental message. For reasons best known to myself, it seemed like a good idea at the time to embark on a series of massive ocean crossings alone in a rowboat, using my expeditions as a campaigning platform to get my message across through blogs, social media, podcasts, talks and books.

For seven years, I rode solo across three oceans—the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian. At the risk of stating the obvious, it was really, really hard. I spent up to five months alone at sea, rowing for 12 hours a day. What kept me going was my sense that our environmental crisis is literally the most important issue on the face of the planet.

I learned a lot on the ocean, and I would like to share three insights that are relevant here. First, the Earth is surprisingly small. I managed to row across a large portion of it at something less than walking speed in just 520 days and nights. This small blue dot is now having to support 8 billion of us and our ever-increasingly materialistic lifestyle, with all the extraction, pollution and waste that entails.

Secondly, nature is incredibly powerful. There is nothing quite like being alone in a 7-metre rowboat in the middle of a storm to make that very apparent. We may think we have nature tamed, but we do not. The recent wildfires, floods and other not-so-natural disasters have made that very clear. Even movie star wealth has not been enough to save homes from the flames. As a species, we have only been on this Earth for the blink of an eye, but we have transformed it out of all recognition. We have gobbled our way through its resources in a way that is by any definition unsustainable. There are laws of humans and there are laws of nature. Whether or not the Bill makes it into human law, for sure the laws of nature will ultimately prevail.

Thirdly, on my journeys I saw the human face of climate change. When I stopped at the Republic of Kiribati on my way across the Pacific, I had a lengthy conversation with the President. With only one point of land more than 6 feet above sea level, his island nation faces existential risk. Later that year, I saw him at COP15 in Copenhagen, just as the talks had fallen apart. Fifteen years later, we are still not on track to save the Republic of Kiribati. How would we feel if our island nation—where we were born, where we had grown up and where our ancestors were buried—was about to disappear beneath the waves?

The Bill is about more than targets and strategies; it is a covenant with the natural world and with future generations. It is our promise to threatened species like the turtle dove, the hazel dormouse and the red squirrel; to the black poplar, the paperbark maple and the star magnolia; to the European eel, the Atlantic salmon and the Arctic char that we will not abandon them to extinction.

Taking bold action on climate and nature is the best way for the Government to demonstrate true global leadership and do what is right, knowing that in the long run the cost of inaction is far, far greater than the cost of action. Are we willing today to do what is required in the long term, rather than what is expedient in the short term? Are we willing to do not what is politically possible, but what is scientifically necessary to ensure a future for our planet? The choice is ours, and the time is now. Let us be the generation who chose to save our natural world, not the generation who stood by and watched it die.

Nature knows no borders. It does not recognise our political divisions. It is time to write a new chapter in our nation's story—one where we finally understand that in saving climate and nature, we save ourselves.

I invite my colleagues to look up at my young friends in the Gallery: look them in the eye, and show them we are willing to do the right thing for their future. I commend this Bill to the House.

10.10 am

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage), the promoter of the Bill, for the hard work that she has done to get to this point—it has, I believe, been a baptism of fire. I am sure many people across the House would like to thank her for what she has done to get the Bill back before the House once again. I also thank the Zero Hour campaign—or the Climate and Nature Bill campaign, as it is sometimes called—and all my constituents who have not given me pause to breathe in telling me to get here today, once again, to vote for the Bill. I am sure many other Members have experienced that, too.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the Members who, before they came to this House, campaigned in support of the Bill, and agreed to vote for it, should be present today to vote for it?

Clive Lewis: We all understand that it can be difficult for Members to come to the House on Thursdays and Fridays; we need to spend time in our constituencies, and many people also have family commitments. I would not for one second want to stand here and judge anyone for what they may have going on in their personal lives or in their constituencies. However, I know that most Members across the House care deeply and passionately about this subject and are here if they can be. I know that many could not be here today, for good reason; some have sickness, and some have other commitments. I am sure that all Members present today will make fantastic contributions, and that those who cannot be here are still rooting for the Bill and will be punching the air at their TV screens.

Many of us have had constituents come to us on this matter, and the Bill has made many headlines. One reason is that it is emblematic of the shortfall that

people feel there is between the political ambition and the on-the-ground delivery that we all know needs to happen. People may be critical of my Government and some of the things they have done in their first six months—I may come on to that in a minute. I would say, though, that they are doing a lot better than the Government who came before. That is, I accept, a low bar; in fact, it is so low I would have difficulty limboing under it. None the less, that is the bar, and we are doing better than the previous Government. I think many Labour Members understand that we have far more to do; there is much more to do, and a lot further to go, and I believe this Government will do it. There will be a debate and a discussion, and I will be part of that, as I am sure will many Members on the Government Benches and across the House.

We cannot get away from the fact that there is growing concern in this country and across the world about what is happening to the natural world. Today, we have a weather bomb off our coast, which is something I had never heard of before in all my 50-something years. We all know in our hearts that that has come about because of the climate and ecological crisis. We know that we are seeing this kind of thing more and more often. We understand that we may be heading into a dystopian future, where food and water crises become more and more frequent. We can already see the impact of “climateflation”, as economists are now calling it—the stubborn inflation where the basic staples of life, such as food and water, increasingly become more costly. Many people are increasingly being priced out of being able to buy the basic food staples they need. That also has an impact on central banks and the political and economic obligation we have given them to tackle inflation.

We have this stubborn inflation that will not go away, and we cannot seem to get growth in our economy. This is the climate crisis—this is what it looks like. We were warned about it by Stern decades ago, but it is here now. We need to do something about it; in fact, we need to do a lot about it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew) is chuntering away—he is more than welcome to make an intervention, if he wishes. If he does not, I will continue.

We understand the situation. The hon. Member for South Cotswolds outlined very clearly—brilliantly, in fact—the scale of the challenge before us. The fact is that 47% of the biodiversity in this country has been completely obliterated. We are one of the most denuded countries in the world when it comes to biodiversity and wildlife. I believe one of the few countries ahead of us is Singapore, which has 30% of the natural world left. That is on the edge—the tipping point—of ecological collapse, and we are not far behind. We should be on 90% and we are on 53%. We need to improve. We need to move ourselves. We need to act. The Bill can help us do that.

I want to talk about something that we in this place still do not quite get: the interconnectedness between climate and nature. The hon. Member for South Cotswolds discussed that very well, and I want to tease it out a bit further. Many of us now see tackling the climate crisis as an economic opportunity. I understand that, and there is a lot of mileage in it. However, it is quite possible to tackle the climate crisis—to build solar farms and wind farms, and do all the things that decarbonise—yet still kill the biodiversity of the planet. It is entirely

[Clive Lewis]

possible to do both. Now that many of us in this place understand the climate crisis, we have to ensure that we also understand the nature and biodiversity crisis.

In my constituency of Norwich South, we had something called the western link, which was a massive road that was going to go through an ancient woodland.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): I do not want to give the hon. Member a lesson in geography, but he will recognise that the western link road is in my constituency and not his.

Clive Lewis: Obviously, I like to expand the borders of Norwich South as far as possible. I will caveat that by saying that it is a big issue in my constituency and many of my constituents will use that road if it is ever built, which hopefully it will not be. I have opposed it, as have many people, and it may no longer be built because of public pressure. That example is instructive, because we were told that if we wanted economic growth in Norfolk, it was necessary to build the road.

I was invited down to the ancient woodland, and yes, there were bats there. I know that the proposed carbon offsetting would have meant the planting of tens of thousands of new saplings to replace the ancient woodland, which would have ensured that the carbon sequestration took place and that we could still hit our climate targets. However, I went down there and saw a flint axe head. I saw an ancient oak woodland that had been there for tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of years. The complex biodiversity that was there—the insects, the birds, the mycelium networks underneath the ground—was beautiful. I could feel how old it was, and it was going to be bulldozed over and replaced with tens of thousands of saplings somewhere else in Norfolk.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Clive Lewis: No, I will make some progress.

At that point, I understood that it is entirely possible for us to hit our climate targets as we rip up and destroy a 10,000 or 50,000-year-old woodland. At that moment, I realised that I could never allow the road to be built. We can look at the Amazon forest and campaign about what should not be happening there, but what about our own backyards? There is a question for the Government—my Government or any Government—about growth: what kind of growth do we want? No one is answering that question. Do we want sustainable growth? What is growth about? What are we growing? Are we growing pollution in our rivers? Are we growing roads that go through ancient woodlands? Yes, that is growth, but is it the growth we want? Do we not want to see growth in well-paid adult social care or renewable technology? Do we not want to see growth in rewilding or sustainable farming? Those are the areas where I want to see economic growth. I do not want to see growth that comes at the cost of my daughter and her generation's future. That is the kind of decision that we in this country and this Government have to make.

I am afraid to say that we cannot have growth on a dead planet. Politicians need to understand that; for too long, we have not. We cannot pick growth out of the air

and say, “Biodiversity will come in second place; climate will come after.” They are all interlinked. We cannot have a viable economy unless the climate and nature of our country and the economy are working well together in unity and in synthesis. That is what needs to happen.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I agree with the hon. Member's point about the kind of growth we want. Does he agree that if the Government were to proceed with expanding Luton airport, as rumours suggest, that would fly in the face of advice from the Government's own climate experts and economists, who say that it would not deliver the kind of growth that airport expansion used to deliver?

Clive Lewis: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and that was a great pun—“fly in the face.” This decision has not been taken. I, for one, do not believe that it is compatible to have expansion of aviation at these four airports: London, which has already been agreed, Luton, Gatwick and Heathrow.

Choices need to be made here. Many of my constituents cannot afford to fly. Everyone wants to see their constituents benefit from the economy, and if we go down that path of expansion, we will be heading in the wrong direction. There will be many Members on both the Government and the Opposition Benches who do not want to see that. I believe that expanding Heathrow is incompatible with having a genuine approach to biodiversity and climate. The Climate Change Committee has already stated, before we even get to the seventh carbon budget, that this should not happen. We will need to have a very hard, honest conversation about that. I do not think it should happen.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for bringing forward the Bill, and to all the academics and campaigners behind it. Listening to the debate, I think the one point we need to draw out is that we need robust scrutiny, and we need to be able to hold Government to account through tighter mechanisms. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that the mechanisms in the Bill are expedited, to ensure that Government get on with achieving the targets that we have all been talking about?

Clive Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution, and indeed for the work she has done on climate and nature throughout her political career. Of course I agree. Everyone understands that in government, there are pressures on Ministers—there are pressures from the Treasury, from business and from vested interests, many of them big and powerful, with big PR and the ability to lobby Ministers in ways that our constituents cannot and in ways that nature cannot. Squirrels, bats and newts cannot lobby like BlackRock and others who want economic growth and profit. This needs to be locked in and legislated for; that is what the Bill is all about.

There are organisations and individuals—billionaires—who have benefited very much from the last 50 or 60 years of rapacious growth and wealth building.

Alice Macdonald (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Clive Lewis: I need to conclude, because I believe other Members want to take part.

We have to understand that there are people who have done very well from this growth. The problem with growth is this: when we get GDP growth in unequal societies, and we bulldoze over beautiful woodland forests and expand airports—

Greg Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Clive Lewis: I will make progress.

When we get that GDP growth in deeply unequal societies, it is those in the top 1% or top 5% who accrue the benefits. A working-class woman in one of the Brexit debates—and I was a remainer—was told, “You’ve never had it so good. You’ve had growth of 3% or 4% for so many years.” She stood up and said, “But that’s your growth, not our growth.” This is what I am talking about.

If we want a sustainable economy and sustainable biodiversity, and if we want to protect nature and ensure that future generations have somewhere to live and have food security and water security, we need to ensure that this Bill, or something like it, becomes law. We need to ensure that Labour Members do the right thing for climate and nature. It is what our constituents want to see.

10.24 am

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) on her good fortune in having secured a place in the ballot and been able to introduce a Bill that I believe will be very important. I am proud to be a sponsor of it. It is deeply flawed in places; we all know that. I have been in this place for quite a long time and I know of no private Member’s Bill that was perfect when it started its journey. However, I hope and believe that it will receive a Second Reading. If it comes to a vote, I shall most certainly support it.

Old men can bore for Britain. As the grandfather of the House, I am probably just as capable of that as anybody else in this place.

Mike Martin: I would like to put it on the record that the right hon. Gentleman is not boring the House.

Sir Roger Gale: Give me time, young man.

At the risk of going down that path, I should like to take a short ramble down memory lane. I was brought up in Poole, in Dorset. My grandparents’ house had a lilac tree in the garden. In flower, it was smothered in red admirals, peacocks, tortoiseshells and all manner of butterflies. At night, the garden was full of moths. These days, we are lucky if we see a cabbage white.

The little house that we lived in was on the edge of Poole Park lake. I played in the park daily; I used to pluck conkers from under the trees during the season for it. I saw stag beetles in abundance. Hedgehogs, which we have heard referred to, roamed free. Out in the hills alongside Cerne Abbas in Dorset, I walked along country paths where my father and I saw foxes, voles, stoats, weasels, rabbits and, up in the sky, birds of prey feeding on them. Where are they now? The World Wildlife Fund says that in the past 50 years—well within my lifetime,

but sadly not within the lifetime of most, albeit not all, hon. Members present—our wildlife has been depleted by 73%.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): As a Poole Member, I recognise those places. Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Dorset on being one of the only places in the country that has turned around the depletion of nature? Thanks to people like Mark and Mo Constantine, we are restoring ospreys and other birds of prey to our wonderful county.

Sir Roger Gale: With great respect to the hon. Lady, who is fortunate to represent a beautiful place, the Poole that I knew is not the Poole that she now knows—not even in the town, never mind in the countryside. Although one or two places such as Branksea island, to give it its proper name, may have improved—the overgrowth was taken down about 20 years ago in a fire—a lot of our national habitat has nevertheless been lost. That is the point that I am trying to make.

I am blessed with five grandchildren. Additionally, I have five surrogate Ukrainian grandchildren and one infant—Florence, the daughter of two of my dearest young friends—whom I care about passionately. I want them to be able to grow up in at least some of the world that I knew, and to enjoy the natural environment that I enjoyed. That is why I am standing here today; I have no other reason. Sadly, I believe that a lot of that is at risk.

The planning changes that have been partially announced this week—I assume that there will in due course be a further statement to the House—seek effectively to abolish the right to judicial review. In my constituency, National Grid is planning to build a monstrosity, 90 feet high and the size of five football pitches, on the Thanet marshes—which it has just discovered are wet—immediately adjacent to a site of special scientific interest. If built, it will indeed be a monstrosity, and will be accompanied by a string of high-powered, high-voltage pylons. If we are denied the right to challenge that, to whom do we look for redress in the future?

Like the last Government, this Government are subsidising Drax, to the tune of billions of pounds. For why? To transport millions of trees, felled and shipped across the Atlantic at God knows what carbon cost, to burn in the interest of some sort of future carbon-free fuel—which, of course, it is not. Why are we allowing this, and why are we paying for it?

Those who oppose the Bill—which, as I have already mentioned, is flawed and will need to be amended—have described it as ideological rhetoric, an assault on our individual freedom, and a direct threat to our way of life that will lead to food rationing. One constituent wrote to me to say that only 50% of our food is produced naturally. Why should we be dependent on importing the other 50%? The answer to that, I am afraid, now lies with the Government’s house building policies. If the planners have their way, acres of farmland in Thanet that are now producing, this year, grade 1 agricultural wheat from which bread is made will, in a couple of years’ time, be growing houses, not food. The National Farmers Union has said, “Please do not undermine UK agriculture by importing agricultural products produced to environmental standards that are different from ours here.”

[Sir Roger Gale]

A couple of weeks ago, I was visiting a friend in Thanet who allowed me to hold a facsimile of part of the skull of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The teeth were about nine inches to a foot long. Those beasts that ruled the Earth have been extinct for millions of years. We are supremely arrogant if we believe that “Drill, baby, drill” is the answer; if we believe that we have a right—someone who wrote to me described it as a God-given right—to carbon fuels.

A couple of weeks ago there was an exhibition in the House organised by Helping Rhinos, which seeks to defend the black rhino, and someone who attended made the case that the black rhino could outlive the human race. We are about to become—if we do not listen today—the authors of our own demise, and that is why I believe that the Bill deserves, at the very least, a Second Reading.

10.35 am

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): From one old fogey to another, I presume. I have never enjoyed a speech by the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) as much as the one he has just delivered; he did not bore the House in any way.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for introducing the Bill; it has had a very long gestation, involving many Members on both sides of the House, but it is good that it has cross-party support. Indeed, the first thing I want to focus on is the importance of cross-party support. These issues had cross-party support in the House for many years following the Climate Change Act 2008, and that continued until about 2015. That was tremendously important in the progress that not only we but the world were able to make. People saw that it was possible for Parliament to come together and do things that were considered radical to tackle climate change. Latterly, unfortunately, that consensus has broken down somewhat, and it is important—it is the duty of all Members of the House—to try to repair that consensus and to build on it. Unless we do, we will face the sort of future that the hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich outlined.

I am conscious that many people want to speak in the debate, so I will pick up quickly on just three issues in the Bill. First, clause 2(2) states:

“The strategy must include annual interim targets consistent with the achievement of the objectives”.

Those objectives are the climate and nature targets, and it is great that the Bill makes the link between the two; that is fundamentally important. However, I want to counsel against annual targets in this regard. As we know—it is well documented in the OEP report that the hon. Lady referred to, as well as in the Climate Change Committee’s reports—there is natural fluctuation annually in what happens around us. Sometimes that is because of the El Niño effect, and sometimes it is for other reasons—nobody in the House will be more familiar with the El Niño effect on the oceans than the hon. Lady. It is important that we understand that sometimes an annual target, to be consistent with the five-year targets and the overall long-term target, will look like it is going backwards. We need to look at that very carefully in the Bill.

Another issue I want to pick up on is clause 3, on the establishment of the climate and nature assembly. In the last Parliament, six Select Committees came together to convene a people’s assembly on the climate. That was a wonderful moment for the House, because instead of our telling the people, “This is what you have to do,” the people were telling us, “This is what we want you to do on our behalf.” It was really important that that took place, and it is great that the hon. Lady has included that measure in the Bill.

I gently point out, however, that the climate assembly disagreed with some of the things that the Committee on Climate Change told us were essential to do. The 66% figure in the clause is actually quite a low threshold. Sometimes the report from the climate assembly was clear that people were not prepared to go as far as the Committee on Climate Change and other nature organisations, such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, believed was imperative. On who is in charge, there is a failure to connect things up, because the clause says that if something is recommended by 66% of the assembly, it must be included in the strategy. We will need to go through those areas in serious detail.

Finally, it is important that the Bill talks about the impact of climate, biodiversity and nature on each other. I pick up on what the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich—the grandfather of the House, as he styled himself—said about Drax. We are going down the wrong road with Drax. I understand the reasons why: Drax power station provides 4% of UK electricity in the power sector. It seen as an important area, so the question is, if we take it away, how will we fill it? But we cannot allow the damage to old growth and to virgin forests that we know is happening in Canada. More than that, as has been said by the noble Lord Birt, who has also seen some of the whistleblowers’ accounts, as I have, those accounts make it clear that the Ofgem investigation was correct in saying that the sustainability of the feedstock had been not only misreported but deliberately misreported. That means that the people concerned in Drax are not fit and proper to run the company, and we should not be paying them—at the moment—£9 billion. We have now to decide whether we will subsidise that even further. The impact on biodiversity is disastrous, and although they say it is renewable, it is not within the timeframe to meet the 2050 climate target. It is salient that the previous Secretary of State, after she ceased to be the Secretary of State, said, “We knew all along that this was not sustainable.” If that is the case, perhaps she should have done something when she was Secretary of State, but it is this Government who must now act to ensure that no further subsidy is paid to Drax.

10.42 am

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I rise in support of the Bill. As a co-sponsor, I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for not just introducing the Bill but the way in which she introduced it. Echoing the hon. Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner), I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) on what was a truly outstanding speech.

As a number of people have referenced, we only have temporary hold of our planet, so let’s start with a good old biblical quote, Genesis 3:19:

“for dust you are and to dust you shall return.”

We have only the lightest of steps on our planet, and we need to remind ourselves of that. The arrogance that, as the apex species, we have taken on our shoulders—the idea that we can do anything and some brainbox somewhere will find a way of ameliorating or attenuating it at some point, so it does not matter, should be part of historical political thinking. In that respect, the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) was absolutely correct.

I want to speak to my colleagues and my party and to those who would describe themselves as centre-right in the political spectrum. Conservatives conserve. We are and have been champions of a notion of handing things on to successor generations. That must mean, in today's parlance, not just physical capital of pounds, shillings and pence and of assets, but natural capital. My party has a proud and innovative track record on these issues. It was Geoffrey Howe's early 1980s Budget, in response to the issues of acid rain, that, through the carrot and stick policy, sought to make unleaded petrol cheaper than four-star, thereby driving people—another pun, I am afraid—to have catalytic converters. My noble friend John Gummer introduced the landfill tax, and the first hypothecated environmental tax in our country. It was a Conservative Government who introduced the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and a Conservative Government who put through the environment Acts of 1986, 1995 and 2021. The Clean Air Act 1956 was introduced by a Conservative Government. Excellent work was done by former colleagues in this House, such as Michael Gove, Rebecca Pow and others, who took these issues seriously, made the case, and we legislated.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman outlined articulately how Government legislation can make a positive difference to our environment. Does he agree that as well as a relentless focus on housing targets, we should also have targets for amenities and for nature and green spaces, so that we can achieve lots of objectives and support the aims of the Bill?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I wanted to echo the point raised by the hon. Member for South Cotswolds. I note the word “or”, but I like the word “and”. Indeed, I will share with the House that I am on a particularly stringent January diet. It is slightly working, I think, but there is still a long way to go. Ask any member of my family, and they would say, “Now Simon, would you like custard or cream?” and my eyebrows would shoot up at the word “or”, as I much prefer “and”. The hon. Lady was right: climate and nature are two sides of the same coin, and have a close, interwoven symbiotic relationship.

I say to the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) in response to his intervention, again echoing the hon. Member for Norwich South, that of course we must have growth, but too often the didacts from both sides of the debate say that it is either/or: we can either have a biodiverse natural environment and address climate change, or we can have growth, but we cannot have both. Well, it depends first on what type and kind of policies we pursue when addressing CO₂ emissions and the drive to net zero, but also on what

type of growth one has. It must be a legitimate anxiety, but I am pretty confident that many people who elected the Labour party into government believed that they would get that fact: that the definition of “growth” needed to be reset in order to meet the challenges that we now face.

The Budget—I shall be charitable—did not quite land as the Chancellor of the Exchequer hoped or expected, and some of the economic indicators are not pointing in the direction that any Government would like to see. I hope it will not fall on deaf ears—the two Ministers on the Front Bench have a long and respected track record in addressing these issues when they sat on the Opposition Benches, which I hope they will continue now that they sit on the Treasury Bench. I hope that in order to prove this to people who are anxious about economic growth, and the fact that there does not appear to be very much, it will not be foot-to-the-floor growth of any type, anywhere, in order just to nudge the figures. It has to be the right kind of growth, and sustainability has to be at its heart.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich asked: is this Bill perfect? No, and I do not think that the hon. Member for South Cotswolds would claim perfection. My right hon. Friend said that he had never seen a private Member's Bill that was perfect and beyond amendment; I have to say to him that in my nearly 10 years in this place, I have yet to see a Government Bill that could be described as perfect and without the possibility of improvement by amendment.

I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends: let us not sacrifice the good in pursuit of the excellent. We have to make progress. Are many of the issues addressed by the Bill difficult? Yes, but what do we all usually say to our children? “Things which are difficult are usually much more worthwhile seeking to attain than the easy, low-hanging fruit.” Will the Bill come with costs? Let us be frank: we must all be conscious that we have come through or are coming through a cost of living crisis, and inflation has eroded people's ability to spend and fuel costs are high. But to those who simplistically say, “Well, we can't afford to do this; now is not the right time in the economic cycle,” I say, with the greatest of politeness: if not now, when? I do not believe that we can afford not to do this. Failure to do so would be the longest suicide note in history for our species.

On our coastline, there are places that are built below sea level—one thinks of Canvey Island—so this is not just something that is happening elsewhere, about which we should be slightly anxious but not at all concerned. Rising sea levels and other changes will affect us here at home as well. We need to be careful in our consideration of that. For those who claim a driving concern about the need to control immigration, I say in all sincerity that I do not believe that one can divorce from that addressing the changes to our planet that climate change is introducing, as it will be a major spur for fellow members of our species to pack up their belongings, meagre or otherwise, and try to find a place of safety for themselves and their families, where they are able to grow a bit of food and sustain their lifestyles, meagre as they may be.

To those who say, “Hang on a moment, our emissions are not too bad, and we've got to look to China and everybody else,” I say: pollution does not respect

[Simon Hoare]

international boundaries. It moves on the tides and the winds. We have lulled ourselves into a false sense of security, because, in essence, we have exported the production of many of our commodities—needed, desired and wanted—overseas. We have said, “Look, our manufacturing emissions have gone down,” but the production of those products is still creating emissions elsewhere. There are some noble aims in the Bill that we should think about.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hoare: To my neighbour from West Dorset? Of course.

Edward Morello: I thank my Dorset neighbour for giving way. As always, I find myself agreeing with a lot of what he says, not least on the cost of inaction being far greater than the cost of action. He makes many good points about the fact that we have outsourced our carbon emissions to places far away, but does he agree that we often fail to sell the opportunities around tackling climate change, especially for British businesses, such as those provided by tidal and wave technologies? We should celebrate those opportunities. The Government talk about growth; there is so much opportunity for growth in this sector, and we should do more.

Simon Hoare: This is getting rather worrying, because I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Either he is doing harm to his political career or I am doing harm to what might be left of mine. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the shadow Deputy Chief Whip to jot that down in his little red book.

I find UK manufacturing really strange in this respect, because the trajectory of policy for the past several years has been very clear. We are not trying to make our petrol combustion engines go faster; we are trying to make electric vehicles more reliable, less costly, travel further and so on. Why has UK plc manufacturing not grabbed hold of that as a fourth industrial revolution and led the way, in the way that our forefathers did at the start of the first industrial revolution? We have to look to private equity and others to invest.

I was pleased to see an investment in a solar farm in my constituency. I visited the site to see where it was all going to go and how it was going to plug in, and I asked, “If you broke down a solar panel, where did the component parts come from?” Not a single component had been manufactured in the United Kingdom. They had come from about 12 different countries; the only thing that we had done was assemble them. I say to our entrepreneurs and our leaders of industry and commerce that we are better than that. We are not just assemblers; we are makers and innovators. We are an island race that has worked on free trade and exporting values, ideas and products across the surface of the globe. This is a time for us to lead in the export of actual hard power, and drive forward an international alliance on these important issues.

Sir Christopher Chope: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Simon Hoare: Dorset is well represented this morning. I will of course give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch.

Sir Christopher Chope: My hon. Friend has not mentioned China specifically, but China is still intent on increasing its CO₂ emissions until at least 2030. As a result, it is able to compete unfairly with what would be UK enterprise if we had not put a stranglehold on it with all these regulatory restrictions. How does he expect to deal with the issue of China?

Simon Hoare: Let me respond to my hon. Friend by quoting one of his great political heroes, the noble Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton: just because we cannot do good everywhere, that does not mean we cannot do a little bit of good here. I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. Of course we have to be conscious of cost differentials, production costs and all the rest of it, but I say to him respectfully that if the rest of the world does something that is to the good, and one or two countries decide not to, or go at a slower pace or on a different path, I do not believe we should just stop, shrug, throw it up in the air and say, “Oh, well, if not everybody’s doing it, why the hell should we?” We led the abolition of slavery. Nobody else was doing it. We did it because we thought it was right. We introduced factory Acts. Nobody else was doing it. We did it because we thought it was right. We introduced votes for women. [Interruption.] Not me personally! I am not as old as my hon. Friend; I have just had a hard life.

We have led. It is what the United Kingdom does. We are not a nation that follows; we are a nation that sculps, leads, forms, challenges, cajoles and encourages.

Daisy Cooper: Will the hon. Member give way?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Lady needed encouragement; she has got it.

Daisy Cooper: I rarely need much encouragement. The hon. Member is making an impassioned speech about the fact that this country has led, and it can continue to lead in this area. He talked about hard power. Does he agree with me and my Liberal Democrat colleagues that if our country is to be better than just assembling parts, we need urgently to rip up the red tape that is stopping so many of our home-grown manufacturers building the climate technology of the future because of the trade barriers that exist with our EU neighbours?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Lady is pushing at an open door. There is much merit in the trade and co-operation agreement that we have with the European Union. That should never have been seen as an event; it should be an evolutionary process, responding to events in a pragmatic and sensible way while always maintaining the integrity of the result of the Brexit referendum. She and I were on the same side in that debate. We lost, and we now have to play the hand of cards that we have been dealt.

I have received emails describing me as a “dangerous radical” and a Stalinist. I have been called many things in my time, but a Stalinist dangerous radical was new to me. My North Dorset constituency is about 440 square miles, of which only 12% is built upon; the rest is open farmland, hill land, ancient woodland and so on.

I had hoped that I might have been able to finish my speech by now, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am just getting into the romantic prose. I notice that the clock

stands at 10.59 am, and I understand that you want the statement to be given at 11 am. I am now in “Just a Minute”, talking down the clock without hesitation, repetition or deviation—

Proceedings interrupted (Standing Order No. 11(4)).

Unity Contract

11 am

The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle): It is almost a shame to interrupt the flow of the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to update the House on an important development relating to our Royal Navy submarine fleet that will boost national security and economic growth, and deliver savings to the taxpayer.

This morning, my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary is visiting the Rolls-Royce nuclear skills academy site in Derby to announce our new Unity contract with Rolls-Royce Submarines. Unity is worth around £9 billion over eight years and, as its name implies, brings together eight contracts into one, covering the research, design, manufacture and in-service support of the nuclear reactors that power the current and planned Royal Navy submarine fleet, which helps to keep the nation and our allies safe.

This is the biggest contract that Rolls-Royce has ever had with the UK Ministry of Defence. The contract will help Rolls-Royce to operate in a more integrated and efficient way, driving efficiencies, reducing waste, saving more than £400 million and delivering on the Government's commitment to provide value for money for the taxpayer. It will ensure that our committed submariners, who, alongside their families, sacrifice so much to keep us all safe, can continue to protect us around the clock, every minute of every day.

Not only is this new deal a boost for our national security, but it underpins the Government's triple-lock guarantee to our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent and our important AUKUS defence and security partnership with the United States of America and Australia by enabling the development of our next-generation SSN-AUKUS nuclear powered, conventionally armed submarines.

The Unity contract is also a boost for British industry, for the resilience of our defence supply chains, and for jobs, skills and economic growth in communities in the east midlands and across the country. The Unity deal will create more than 1,000 new jobs, sustaining around 5,000 skilled and well-paid roles in total—the majority in Derby, but also around 200 in Glasgow and Cardiff. The deal will also help to deliver the next generations of skilled workers we need in our nuclear defence enterprise, with the Rolls-Royce nuclear skills academy offering 200 apprenticeships each year. Unity also paves the way for the use of safer and more sustainable materials in our fleet, supporting the commitment made by defence to better environmental performance.

The new contract with Rolls-Royce—an historic British industrial success story—comes as we consult industry partners and trade unions on our new defence industrial strategy, and as we seek to create a new partnership with Government fit for our more uncertain age. The Government recognise not only that defence is critical for our national security, but that it is a key driver for economic growth. It makes the UK more resilient. Through our defence industrial strategy, we aim to strengthen the virtuous circle that connects a more resilient UK-based defence sector and economic growth across the country. That virtuous circle will enhance our

[*Maria Eagle*]

military capabilities and in turn make them more resilient, which not only deters our enemies but acts as an engine of growth for opportunities, skills and well-paid jobs across our devolved nations and regions.

By onshoring and putting British manufacture first wherever it is in our national interest to do so, we will build on the 200,000 skilled British jobs currently sustained by MOD expenditure, delivering on the Government's plan for change and our primary mission to kick-start economic growth, while simultaneously delivering on the first duty of any Government: to keep their people safe.

We in this House are all passionate about defence. The defence of our nation should be too important for political point scoring, and I hope we have a consensus on that. It is in that spirit that we are consulting on our strategic defence review, so that we have a national plan for defence—not just a Labour plan for defence—that will inform our path towards spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. In that spirit, I thank my predecessor in the role, the current shadow Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), for the groundwork he put into this deal. What he started, we are finishing.

On Wednesday, the Defence Secretary updated the House on the key role of our submarine fleet and the role it plays in deterrence. We all saw it warding off the Russian spy ship Yantar from UK waters. We should be under no illusions: this was just the latest example of growing Russian aggression targeting the UK and our NATO allies. In our increasingly dangerous world, the UK's nuclear deterrent is our ultimate insurance policy that protects our freedoms and our way of life.

This deal underpins that insurance policy for the next eight years, as we begin to phase in our new fleet of Dreadnought nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines. This deal also foreshadows a brighter future for the UK defence sector, guided by our defence industrial strategy, which will make us more secure and prosperous at home and strong abroad. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

11.6 am

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I thank the right hon. Lady not only for early sight of her statement, but for her kind words in recognising my contribution to delivering this deal—Unity by name and by nature. As with the Annington deal and the UK-Germany barrel-making deal, I can safely say that this deal is profoundly to the benefit of our country. While I would have dearly loved to conclude those deals while in office, it is better that such deals are delivered under any Government than not at all, and I am delighted to be responding to the statement today.

While it is unusual to have statements on a sitting Friday, I thank the Government for announcing this deal to the House today, because it speaks to its huge importance to our national interest. Before explaining why the deal is so important, may I first thank all those involved in bringing it forward: those at the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy, and in particular the commercial teams, who have worked so hard to iron out

all the complex details needed to get it over the line, and of course Rolls-Royce itself? On that note, I thank everyone in the defence nuclear enterprise, and, as the right hon. Lady said, we give particular thanks, as we always should, to those who crew our nuclear submarines, and in particular the 24/7 continuous at-sea deterrent.

My personal experience—I am sure the right hon. Lady will have discovered this in the many international engagements in the export role that is so important to any Ministry of Defence procurement—was that Rolls-Royce was the single UK defence company, possibly only matched by BAE, that seemed to have greater success in penetrating major export markets. Visiting Raynesway last April to keep this project moving forward, I saw the sheer scale of Rolls-Royce's commitment to apprenticeships and manufacturing excellence. That underlined how it is a domestic and international industrial success story for UK plc, and we should do everything possible to support it. The deal is economically crucial, helping sustain our sovereign defence nuclear industry, as the right hon. Lady said, and in turn sustaining thousands of skilled jobs.

I was struck, while speaking to apprentices at both Barrow and Raynesway, that of particular appeal to them was the assurance of a long-term career pathway. Today's announcement will underwrite not just a major corporate investment, but the life plans of thousands of young people, and I wish them all well. Skills remain a challenge, given the sheer scale of the nuclear undertaking, so will the right hon. Lady update us on how she is taking forward the work of the pan-civil and defence nuclear skills taskforce, which I launched together with the then civil nuclear Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), in August 2023?

This deal clearly builds on the good work done by the previous Conservative Government, who always backed our armed forces, our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent and our defence industrial base, and who brought the mighty AUKUS partnership to life with the US and Australia. Can the right hon. Lady provide further detail on her very welcome confirmation that this deal will underpin AUKUS?

In talking about the economic importance of this announcement, we should also be clear about its military significance. The right hon. Lady was right to refer to the Secretary of State's statement on Wednesday regarding the Russian spy ship Yantar and its grey zone activities in our waters and economic zone. I said in response that we stood shoulder to shoulder with the Government not just on Ukraine but in standing up to the Russian threat, which I still regard as by far the most immediate and serious in terms of the UK homeland. I urged him to lean into being more open with the country about the Russian threat, while of course protecting operational security, so that the country can understand the nature of the threat and what it will inevitably mean for defence expenditure.

The strategic defence review is expected in the spring, and I hope that it will be published as early as possible—ideally in March—but whenever it is, it appears likely that there will be a particular focus on homeland security and missile defence. That is entirely right, but we must all understand a fact of military reality: there is one UK capability that matters above all in the Kremlin, and

that is our continuous at-sea deterrent. There is a strong argument for reinforcing our conventional missile defence capability for the UK homeland, but that is not what deters Putin from striking our cities; rather, it is our potential to retaliate. For that reason, we must continue to give absolute priority to the deterrent in our defence budget, and that budget must be urgently increased. Whatever else is announced in the SDR, I hope the right hon. Lady will confirm both that investment in our deterrent will remain central to all future plans and that we will hit 2.5% during this Parliament.

While the deterrent is inevitably a multibillion-pound undertaking, it remains a way to guarantee our security for a fraction of overall public expenditure. Today has shown that it also offers a huge economic return to the country, underpinning manufacturing excellence. As such, and given the threats that we face, it has never been more vital that we continue to strengthen our defence nuclear enterprise.

Maria Eagle: I find myself agreeing with a lot of what the shadow Defence Secretary said—unity, indeed. He asked about 2.5%. I think we all agree that defence spending needs to increase, and he knows well that we have just increased it by 5.9% in real terms this coming year—it is up by £2.9 billion—as a step on the way to getting to 2.5%, which is a cast-iron guarantee.

The hon. Member referred to the strategic defence review, which as he knows we said will be coming in the spring, and that is still the plan. He will have to wait a little longer to see the precise details of the threats that that identifies and, therefore, the capabilities we need to develop.

I think there is general agreement across the House about the dangers of things like the Yantar incident, which the Secretary of State spoke about on Wednesday, and we will all have noted that it was dealt with by one of our nuclear submarines. That reinforces the point that the hon. Member made about the importance of our deterrent.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): The contract that our Defence Secretary has announced at Rolls-Royce in Derby today is the biggest Ministry of Defence contract in its history. It will make a major contribution to the long-term investment in our city that I and neighbouring MPs have been calling for, creating 1,000 jobs and protecting 4,000 more. It is an investment not only in industry and nuclear, but in the skills and expertise for which our city is famous. Does the Minister agree that this represents a landmark deal for British defence?

Maria Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. She knows a lot about the subject, and she is correct that it is a landmark deal. It is particularly beneficial for Derby. As she said, there are many skills there already, but the Nuclear Skills Academy will be creating 200 apprenticeships and opportunities a year for young people to get into nuclear skills. Of course, those are transferable skills that are relevant not only on the military side but on the civil side, which will give young people with those skills great opportunities in life. That is one of the most important parts of the deal.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): I welcome this announcement of the UK's new Unity contract with Rolls-Royce Submarines. This £9 billion investment will create 1,000 new jobs in the industry, and this sort of investment represents a boost for not only our national security but communities across the UK.

It is right that we celebrate this success for British industry and its skilled workforce. However, while we welcome this development, the Government must go further to create the stability and certainty that businesses need to thrive. Long-term growth requires an industrial strategy that incentivises investment in ethical, inclusive new technologies such as artificial intelligence and clean energy. We must position the UK as a global leader in these sectors, so that we tackle the climate crisis while creating good jobs and driving economic growth.

Furthermore, we urge the Government to work in closer partnership with businesses of all sizes. Small and medium-sized enterprises are vital to the defence supply chain, yet too often they are left out of the major procurement processes. What are the Government doing to ensure that SMEs are included in the MOD procurement process? We also want to unlock British businesses' global potential by bringing down trade barriers and building stronger relationships with our closest trading partners, including by fixing our broken relationship with Europe.

Universal liberal principles are at the core of what we believe as Liberal Democrats, not least among them internationalism, human rights, the pursuit of peace and the rule of law. That is why we continue to champion the liberal, rules-based international order, which provides a strong basis for multilateral co-operation to address the world's biggest problems.

The Liberal Democrats believe in a policy of pursuing global disarmament. However, in the meantime, and in the light of all the current threats, we call on the Government to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent and maintain the current posture of continuous at-sea deterrence.

I urge the Government to rebuild trust with our European allies. Our security is inseparable from Europe's, and we must work towards a UK-EU defence and security agreement. Recent agreements with Germany are promising, but they must be a starting point for deeper co-operation. What steps are being taken to strengthen the AUKUS partnership with the United States and Australia, particularly in the light of concerns about potential shifts in US foreign policy? National security and economic growth—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Liberal Democrat spokeswoman will be aware that she is allocated two minutes, which she has already exceeded significantly.

Maria Eagle: I welcome the hon. Lady's support for the deal and for our continuous at-sea deterrent; that has not always been the Liberal Democrats' position, so I welcome the fact that consensus has increased in this House.

The point that the hon. Lady made about enabling SMEs to get involved in the defence supply chain is tremendously important. We are currently consulting on the defence industrial strategy, and I am particularly keen to ensure we take steps to make that better, because

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the potential for innovation, agility and pull-through of new technologies is tremendous. I invite her to contribute to the consultation and to watch out for the defence industrial strategy when it is published.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I very much welcome this statement. As the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire) said, we need SMEs to support our defence sector. One of the key challenges facing our defence sector, as Ukraine has shown, is that we need to speed up the pace of innovation in this new era facing defence. In Stevenage, we have many excellent SMEs supporting our local defence primes, Airbus and MBDA. Will my right hon. Friend show her support for what SMEs are doing and support them in the future?

Maria Eagle: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's point, which is that SMEs form a central part of our industrial base and can do more, if we encourage and enable them to do so, to boost our defence, boost jobs and boost economic growth in all regions and nations. I invite him to get involved in our defence industrial strategy consultation, which is ongoing.

Ben Obese-Jeety (Huntingdon) (Con): I welcome the Unity contract and the work done by the previous Government to initiate it. It is a critical step in maintaining our submarine fleet and facilitating our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence. The Minister recently confirmed to me that, excluding Trident, our defence spending as a percentage of GDP is actually only 1.9%. That puts the UK 23rd of 32 NATO countries, below North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and others. Our non-nuclear NATO partners currently spend proportionally more than we do on conventional forces, while Trident is a measure of last resort. To ensure that we are properly resourced for high-intensity, multi-domain collective defence, should our NATO spending commitment not be to meet that target on conventional forces, with our nuclear capability in addition to that?

Maria Eagle: I am not sure that is even the policy of the Conservative party—the shadow Defence Secretary can confirm whether that is the case. If I may say so, it is a bit sleight of hand to say that taking out a big chunk of our spending, which we are actually spending, will leave us well in deficit. Of course it would. However, I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes and the importance he attaches to spending on conventional defence. That is an important point, and once the strategic defence review is published he will be able to see the threats it identifies and how we will improve our capability to deal with them.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I congratulate the Government and Rolls-Royce on their fantastic and innovative Unity project. As today's welcome announcement shows, defence is a fantastic pipeline for building skills and refining the jobs and growth that this country needs. That is felt and needed nowhere more than in my constituency, the home of the Royal Navy and of so many defence companies, be they national or SMEs. Alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), I intend to hold a roundtable later this year on growth strategy.

Can the Minister assure the House that the defence industrial strategy will have a focus on training and skills and will promote and prioritise British industry?

Maria Eagle: I commend my hon. Friend for holding a roundtable; I have done a few of those around the country lately. It is quite illuminating to hear what comes back, particularly from small firms, and it will be informing our defence industrial strategy. I agree that there is much potential in all our constituencies across the nations and regions to get economic growth and jobs from boosting SMEs.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I very much welcome the Minister's announcement, but can she tell us where we are getting to with the industrial strategy in utilising Rolls-Royce's expertise to produce small modular reactors? There seems to have been a lot of delays in actually delivering on those, yet Rolls-Royce has demonstrated by this contract that it is a leading global player in that field.

Maria Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is right that there is much innovation in the defence industries in our nations, and often with dual-use technology, which means that it is not just about defence but about a broader range of potential opportunities. I see no reason why all those opportunities cannot be exploited using our defence industrial strategy to kick things off. I hope to see that in future.

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): As a former official of the GMB shipbuilding and ship repair union, I warmly welcome today's announcement. Does the Minister agree that an aim of the defence industrial strategy should be to open up opportunities for jobs and apprenticeships to people from disadvantaged communities?

Maria Eagle: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Our defence industries are largely based outside of London and the south-east and are in all our nations and regions. Quite often they are focused already in areas that have some deprivation. My hon. Friend is right to identify that defence industries across our nations and regions can be a part of regional development as well as boosting national growth.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The nuclear defence enterprise for the UK is an extortionate vanity project. We would much rather the money was spent on conventional defence capabilities. The Minister states that the contract will drive efficiency to reduce waste and save over £400 million. Given that no major nuclear contract has ever come in under budget, how does she expect this to happen? On the 200 jobs that will be split between Cardiff and Glasgow, can she let us know when during the course of the contract these jobs will be delivered? Will it be at the end or earlier on, and what will the split be between Cardiff and Glasgow?

Maria Eagle: I opened the centre in Glasgow that has some of those jobs, and I can assure the hon. Lady that it is well under way, and although the Cardiff centre is not quite up and running yet, it soon will be. So those jobs are already there. I disagree with her first point, of course, but that is fair enough. I hope that she will see

the importance of manufacturing skills and job opportunities, many of which have dual-use applications, as indeed do the apprenticeships at Rolls-Royce in Derby. There is nothing to suggest that the young people who obtain those nuclear qualifications will not go and work on the civil side of nuclear in the future, and even she ought to be able to see the importance of skilling up young people and creating job opportunities across the nations and regions.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I think we all want to live in a world where we do not need a nuclear deterrent, but it is clear from some of the conflicts we have seen recently that that is not the world we currently live in. Does the Minister agree that the first duty of a Government is to protect the country, and will she welcome the work being done at Raytheon, which we both visited—it seems a lifetime ago, but it was actually only seven months ago—to ensure that we are manufacturing and producing defence systems in-house, rather than relying on foreign imports?

Maria Eagle: I very much agree with what my hon. Friend has said, and I fondly remember that visit to his constituency during, I think, the general election campaign. Defending the country is clearly the first duty of any Government. My hon. Friend will have noted from the statement of intent in respect of our defence industrial strategy that one of our key aims is to build more in Britain and to improve British jobs and economic growth through the money that we spend on our defence, and I think that that is a win-win.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): This deal is absolutely the right thing to do, and I very much welcome the Minister's commitment to our continuous at-sea deterrent, which has not always received universal support on the Labour Benches. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State asked the Minister a very clear question about how she sees this underpinning the AUKUS deal for the long term, but unless my hearing is even worse than I thought, I am not sure that she gave a clear commitment in that regard. May I give her another opportunity to make absolutely clear this Government's commitment to AUKUS and this deal's central role in its long-term future?

Maria Eagle: I was attempting to answer a great many questions from the shadow Defence Secretary and did not reach that one, so the hon. Gentleman is right to raise it with me again. The deal enables us to boost production and the capacity that we need in order to deliver SSN-AUKUS as a follow-on from our Dreadnought submarines. Without it, we would be in much more difficulty in ensuring that we can do everything that we need to do on time to deliver those commitments. It is essential to the delivery of our AUKUS commitment, as it is to the delivery of our own continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): Like many people from Gateshead, I am proud to say that I come from a long line of people working in the defence manufacturing industry. Can the Minister assure me that this deal, and other defence manufacturing deals, will benefit those in all the nations and regions of the country, especially Gateshead?

Maria Eagle: Yes, I can assure my hon. Friend of that. This is the biggest deal that Rolls-Royce has ever signed. It is a long-term commitment between the Government and Rolls-Royce. It increases efficiency and resilience, creates jobs, and makes savings. These are virtuous circles, and if we can achieve them in other parts of our defence spending, they will benefit the entire nation and all the regions within it.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Immediately before the Minister came to the House, we were debating environmental protections to secure our country and the future of our globe. In the spirit of unity, will the Minister agree that there is little point in talking about environmental protections and security without also securing our world through robust defence spending? There is nothing worse for the environment and humanity than war, and we need to invest in defence in order to secure our globe and to secure this country.

Maria Eagle: In the spirit of unity—that pun is becoming a bit wearing, but I have just used it, too—I very much agree that the foundation of security and deterrence is a key part of us being able to advance as a nation. Without that security, we cannot secure any of our public services or our way of life.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): Today's announcement will help deliver long-term growth, boost British industry, and create and support thousands of skilled jobs. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that a key ambition of our defence industrial strategy will be to deliver jobs in every nation and region, and indeed in smaller towns such as Rugby, where GE Vernova is doing fine work to support the Royal Navy with advanced hybrid electric propulsion technology for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's frontline fleet?

Maria Eagle: Yes, I can confirm that. MOD spending already supports over 200,000 jobs directly, and many more besides, and my hon. Friend has set out an example from his constituency. The defence industrial strategy will aim to create jobs in every nation and region of this country.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for a very positive statement—it is always good to have positive statements, and today is one of those occasions. It is great news to hear of the wonderful investment, which is needed to shore up not only defence but our manufacturing industry. Looking at the job allocation, I see that there are 800 jobs for Derby in England, and 200 for Glasgow in Scotland and Cardiff in Wales. I have no doubt whatsoever about the Minister's commitment to job creation, but will she outline how the Government will ensure that businesses and factories in Northern Ireland can be involved in the supply or provision of parts? Particularly, will she outline whether the skills of Harland and Wolff can be utilised in fulfilment of the contract, and whether UK-wide involvement was a stipulation of the deal with Rolls-Royce?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, is fighting for his constituents. He makes some good points about Harland and Wolff and skills. We do have defence contracts based at Harland and Wolff, and I will be visiting Belfast in due course—I will not give him the

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exact date, but it is soon—in order to galvanise and understand what is available, particularly in the SME community, in Northern Ireland. I look forward perhaps to talking to him about that at the time.

Henry Tufnell (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab): Today's announcement is a fantastic boost to British industry and British manufacturing. In my constituency we have a proud history of supporting our national security. What steps will the Minister be taking in the defence industrial strategy to support local economic growth in constituencies such as mine in west Wales?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right that there is great potential for economic growth in all of our nations and regions, and in every one of our constituencies, in respect of the extra spending that the MOD is now able to offer to keep our nations safe. I am sure that he has SMEs in his constituency that can benefit from defence contracts if we can make it easier for them to engage with defence, which is one of the problems that they all tell me they have at present.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): As the final word comes back to the east midlands, I thank the Minister for her hard work. Many of my constituents in Rushcliffe work for Rolls-Royce and will wholeheartedly welcome the announcement today. Could the Minister briefly explain how skills development will link to the evolving defence industrial strategy, and how she will work with our fantastic Mayor of the East Midlands, Claire Ward, to maximise the opportunities for our region?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right that skills are key, which is why this deal has established a defence nuclear skills academy to ensure that 200 apprentices a year can benefit from gaining those skills. I have no doubt that long-term partnerships with defence industries will enable us to do that on a broader scale. The defence industrial strategy will be a key part of giving that confidence to companies that it is the right time to invest in skills.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the Minister for her statement. While the Ministers switch places, I inform Members that we are going to return to the Climate and Nature Bill.

Climate and Nature Bill

Proceedings resumed.

11.35 am

Simon Hoare: As I was saying—[*Laughter.*] I was tempted to scare the House by saying, “Having concluded my opening remarks,” but I think I had better not.

If I may, I will address directly the Minister on the Treasury Bench, the hon. Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh). I want to do so sincerely, because I like and admire her enormously, and I hope she knows that. She will know that a vast number of her colleagues on the Benches behind her and elsewhere support the general thrust of the Bill and are looking for a generous response from the Government, both to avoid having to divide the House and, more importantly, to make progress on these issues, which I know full well she holds close to her heart. I say to her—not in the spirit of any sort of ransom or blackmail—that how the Government respond to this debate will, in many ways, shape and sculpt how those of us who support the Bill respond in kind.

I will bring my remarks to a conclusion. Some have said that those who support the Bill are dangerous, Stalinistic, anti-farming land grabbers. I opened my speech by saying that I wanted to speak specifically to my fellow Conservatives, both in this place and across the country, where the siren voices of simplistic populism call to us and try to drag us on to the rocks that we would be well advised to avoid. Let me close with the words of a dangerous left-wing activist:

“It is mankind and his activities which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways... We must use science to cast a light ahead”.

The same dangerous leftie said:

“But the threat to our world comes not only from tyrants and their tanks”—

appropriate, given the statement we have just had—

“It can be more insidious though less visible. The danger of global warming is as yet unseen, but real enough for us to make changes and sacrifices, so that we do not live at the expense of future generations... We must remember our duty to Nature before it is too late.”

Which radical Stalinist am I quoting? From which *Guardian*-writing journalist am I purloining phrases? Well, it is that dangerous leftie herself: Margaret Thatcher. The first quote is from her United Nations speech in 1989; her views, and the views of my party, are formed by science and the facts, with her basic university training at Somerville College, Oxford. The second quote was from the second world climate conference, after she had left office in 1990. I say to Conservatives today that we would still be well advised to heed her caution, her advice and her words.

11.38 am

Alice Macdonald (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill and on this very important subject. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for her passionate speech and for giving us all an opportunity to discuss this subject. I also welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). It has been very good so far to see so much consensus across the House on this issue.

Having campaigned on climate change before entering this place, and serving a constituency where so many people care about this issue, I know how vital it is that we take bold action to protect our planet. The science is clear: last year was the warmest year on record and the first to exceed 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels, and we have seen a shocking 73% decline in average wildlife population sizes globally since 1970. I believe this Government know how important it is to move rapidly to tackle these crises. In the context of the Bill, I will highlight some of the measures the Government have taken in their first six months that I welcome.

The establishment of Great British Energy will help deliver green, clean energy and improve our energy security. The nine-year onshore wind ban was lifted in just 72 hours of our coming into office. We have confirmed that we will ban fracking. As a proud Co-operative and Labour MP, I welcome the commitment to community energy. This type of leadership is not new from Labour. As has been mentioned, the last Labour Government led the way in passing the Climate Change Act, establishing a legal requirement for the UK to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, we are here to discuss nature as well. As climate affects nature, so nature affects climate. I particularly welcome the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will help clean up our rivers, lakes and seas. I want to talk about two aspects locally. I hope hon. Members will forgive me—as many Members from Norfolk are here they may have heard some of this before. I will then turn to global aspects. Many of the Bill's measures will benefit my constituency of Norwich North and the county of Norfolk. That is vital because Norfolk is on the frontline of climate change. As the Norwich Climate Commission has set out, Norfolk has been identified as the driest region of England because of climate change, agricultural irrigation demands and population growth.

Norfolk is also at substantial risk of flooding, which is only exacerbated by climate change. To compound the challenge, Norfolk has part of the fastest eroding coastline in north-west Europe. A recent report by Norfolk county council spells out the challenge posed by coastal erosion, including the prediction of possible sea level rises of up to 1.15 metres by the end of the century. My constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) is not in his place, but it is estimated that approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2105 solely in his constituency.

Climate change has a keenly felt impact on our area, as it does across the country and the world. The nature crisis will also have a hugely detrimental effect. I am sure that many Members have visited the broads—I know that many people have boats there. It is one of the jewels of our county and of our country, as a national park of which we can all be proud. I am proud that my constituency includes parts of it. But recently, the Broads Authority has declared a biodiversity emergency, warning of the need for urgent action to protect wildlife from the impacts of climate change and pollution. The broads has been losing species at a rate of six per decade in the past 50 years. Vital to addressing this decline is better land and water management and adaptation measures. I hope that the Minister will touch on that in her

response. I would very much welcome a visit from the Minister to see the broads for herself, though I am sure she has already visited.

We have many challenges in Norfolk, but Norfolk is a key part of the solution. Some 60% of offshore wind energy in the UK is already generated in the east of England, making it an important centre of clean energy. There is even more potential in our region that I know this Government are serious about maximising, in relation not only to our climate change targets but to delivering jobs and growth for our area.

There are 640,000 green jobs in the UK, and they are growing four times faster than overall UK employment. That is a big, exciting opportunity for areas such as mine, especially for young people, many of whom cannot get jobs or do not feel they have got the skills, as was touched on in the statement. It is vital to invest in skills. As the east of England all-party parliamentary group set out, 1.2 million jobs will be needed in the low-carbon and renewable energy sector in England by 2050, and 10% of those are expected to be in the east.

I also want to reference the huge expertise and knowledge in Norwich. I recognise how many scientists contributed to the development of the Bill. We have the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, which has nearly 100 members ranging from PhD researchers to professors. At the Norwich research park we have many fantastic companies working on this agenda. Alora, which I visited recently, is literally growing rice on the surface of the ocean, helping tackle global hunger. Last year, I visited Wendling Beck—hon. Members are getting a tour of Norfolk—in the constituency of the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman). It is one of the most ambitious nature recovery projects in England, reversing biodiversity loss locally, inspiring climate action and building a sustainable and resilient landscape legacy. We need to maximise all the innovation that we have in the UK to deliver on the dual challenge of the nature and climate crises.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who is no longer in his place unfortunately, did not give way to me, I will make the point now that Norwich is also home to a large financial services sector, including Aviva in his constituency. It is a key leader in sustainability. We have not spoken much about the role of business in this agenda, and indeed in the Bill, but it is vital. I welcome the fact that the Government are already accelerating plans to make us the green finance capital of the world, mandating UK-regulated financial institutions and FTSE 100 companies to develop and implement credible plans that align with the 1.5° goal of the Paris agreement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South mentioned airports, of which I am sure there will be much discussion in the months ahead. Norwich airport in my constituency not only provides jobs but is a centre of green aviation excellence. There are important opportunities to ensure that we develop the future of aviation in line with our climate commitments.

I turn to the international aspects of the biodiversity and climate crisis. As I say, before joining this place I was a campaigner working on a range of issues, including climate change. In that role, I was privileged to meet many young activists from around the world who know that their future is at stake, as well as many people on the frontline of climate change, like Hindou Ibrahim,

[Alice Macdonald]

an environmental activist and leader from Chad who has championed the indispensable role that indigenous people and solutions play in this agenda. I am sure that we could mention many examples of similar legislation around the world, even if it is not exactly the same. It is really important to draw on local knowledge. I hope that all those people would be pleased to see the cross-party consensus on the issue in this House and the commitment to bold action, even if we may disagree on some of the specific ways to get there.

This Labour Government are restoring British credibility on the world stage, and a huge part of that is about climate change. That is much needed: as we see countries turning away from the Paris agreement, it is even more vital that we reaffirm our commitment to global treaties. I welcome the launch of the global clean power alliance, which brings 12 countries together to turbocharge the roll-out of clean energy and drive green jobs and investment at home. At COP29, the Prime Minister announced a new climate goal to reduce carbon emissions by 81% by 2035. Importantly, he called on other countries to match that ambition, because none of us can do this alone.

As this debate has focused on the relationship between climate change and biodiversity, it must also be noted that the UK is resolutely focused on delivering the target to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. I welcome commitments such as the £10 million announced for the global biodiversity framework fund.

The last campaign that I worked on was on food and hunger. As WWF has highlighted, the leading driver of habitat loss is a broken food system. I urge the Government to outline what we are doing to tackle that, and to confirm that we are committed to tackling food security alongside climate and nature action.

Finally, I turn to public opinion. The Bill refers to a citizens' assembly. As a councillor, I saw the benefit of local citizens' assemblies. There is a question about the best mechanism to do them nationally; whatever happens with the Bill, I hope that we can continue that important conversation. I know how many people in Norwich are passionate about tackling climate change. When I have spoken at local schools, it is one of the topics that children raise with me, as I am sure they do with many hon. Members, because this is their future. We have many local groups, from Friends of the Earth to Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Climate also comes up on the doorstep—sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, but at least it is a conversation that we are having.

I know that this matters, this Government know that it matters and there is widespread public support, but there is so much more to do. We need to move as fast as we can to address the issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South spoke about the importance of growth and what it looks like. For me, good, sustainable growth and climate and nature commitments are not mutually exclusive. We can build millions more homes and protect our natural resources and biodiversity, and we can create infrastructure that limits damage to our ecosystems and conserves energy.

I want to be clear that I fully back action to tackle the dual nature and climate crises. I believe that the Government are also clear in their commitment to doing so and on the importance of joined-up action and embedding the

agenda across Government. I welcome the bold plans already set out to make Britain a clean energy superpower, to deliver green growth, to protect our natural environment and to lead internationally.

It is now important that we focus on delivery. I can see from today's debate and from so many other debates that we have had in this House that there are many Back Benchers who are ready to hold the Government to account on their promises. Whatever happens with the Bill, I hope that we can maintain the cross-party working and spirit of collaboration as we move forward.

I, too, will finish with a quote—not from Margaret Thatcher, but from the UN Secretary-General. At the start of this year, he said:

“This is climate breakdown—in real time. We must exit this road to ruin—and we have no time to lose.”

I fully agree. As the Secretary-General says, we have seen hope power change. I believe that hope powered the change in Government last July. Many people were hopeful that we would see a step change in this important agenda. I am hopeful that we have a Government who are fully committed to tackling climate change and protecting our planet.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the shadow Minister.

11.49 am

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of His Majesty's official Opposition, and I congratulate the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) on bringing this private Member's Bill before the House today.

The Conservative and Unionist party has a record of which we should be incredibly proud when it comes to protecting our environment. We were the first major economy to halve our carbon emissions. We stopped the burning of coal for electricity. We built the first, second, third, fourth and fifth largest offshore wind farms in the world, which are generating power for the United Kingdom right now. And we introduced the world-leading contracts for difference process, blending the Conservative principles of competition and enterprise.

As referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare)—and he is a friend—Margaret Thatcher, who became the leader of our party 50 years ago next month, was famously the first world leader to raise the issue of climate change on the global stage. She warned the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 of the “insidious danger” that climate change posed through

“the prospect of irretrievable damage to the atmosphere, to the oceans, to earth itself.”

I know that right hon. and hon. Members across the House will agree that, as in almost every other case, she was absolutely right.

We have seen extreme weather patterns across the globe, indicating the severity of the challenge facing the world in the 21st century. Alongside our global partners, we must embrace technology, build new nuclear, reduce waste and enhance efficiency to bring down bills for households, consumers and industry in a way that allows us to protect nature, conserve our landscapes and leave the climate in a better state for generations to come.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): The hon. Gentleman will of course also congratulate the Labour Government before 2010 and the Liberal Democrat coalition on their good work, and it is important, in the spirit of consensus, to do that. However, does he agree that one important issue that is always missing from the debate about climate is national security? If we can be self-sufficient in our energy supplies, that will be really important for our national security. We never talk about that issue in the context of climate, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman, as a Conservative, will agree.

Andrew Bowie: I could not agree more with the hon. Member; in fact, it is quite nice to hear the Liberal Democrats acknowledge that they were actually part of the Government over the last 14 years—they do not always choose to do so. As to the point about national security and energy security, that is why I am so concerned about the Labour Government's plans for our offshore oil and gas industry. Why would we want to rely more on imports, as the Government will, should they go ahead and accelerate the decline in the North sea? However, I am sure we will continue to have that debate as we move forward.

If this private Member's Bill contained measures to ensure a pragmatic and proportionate response to climate change, with households and bill payers at its core, and defended our British wildlife, nature and countryside, I am sure we would all support its aims and ambitions. Indeed, colleagues and friends who support it do so with the admirable, and indeed laudable, intention of seeing the United Kingdom protect the environment, and it is not that ambition with which we take umbrage. However, it is clear that we should not support the damaging measures the Bill would require. If it became law, it would damage our country, our prosperity, the lives of individuals and industries across the United Kingdom.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I wonder where the shadow Minister was when the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said, just 15 minutes ago, that this is not an either/or between prosperity and protecting nature and the climate.

Andrew Bowie: I was actually right here on the Front Bench listening to my hon. Friend, and I agreed with a lot of what he said. However, we are here to debate the contents of the Bill and to decide whether they are something we should support, and I am afraid—to break with the consensus that has been expressed across the House this morning—that we cannot.

The Bill would undermine the power of this Parliament and its democratically elected Members and would bind their hands. As the Bill suggests, the Secretary of State would be duty-bound to act as directed by an unelected body. A world with a cleaner climate and with thriving nature and wildlife is one we all aspire to; it is the core belief of Conservatism that we should seek to leave the country and the world in a better place than that in which we found them, for both our children and our grandchildren. But I am afraid that this Bill would not do that.

In government, we aspired to be a world leader in the energy sector and to embrace a new energy mix that would reduce our carbon footprint, and that is what we

did. We should want to pave the way for other nations, but it should be a path that they would actually want to follow. If the Bill means green levies, soaring bills, the highest electricity prices in the world, boiler taxes, job losses, and rejecting our ability to produce fuel domestically, while increasing imports from abroad and generating lower tax revenues as a result, nobody will follow this path.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): Just last week, a report by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries—we know that by their very nature, actuaries are cautious people—stated that if we continue on our current path, a plausible worst case is that global GDP will collapse by 50% between 2070 and 2090, and that 4 billion lives could be lost by 2050. That is an unimaginable future. Does the shadow Minister agree that the cost of doing nothing will be way more than the cost of acting now?

Andrew Bowie: As I have tried to explain, not just to the hon. Lady but to the House, we have not done nothing. We led the world in so many ways—halving emissions faster than any other G7 nation, building at speed some of the biggest renewable offshore wind farms in the world, which are generating power for the United Kingdom right now, and ending the use of coal for electricity production. No other country has a record that comes close to matching the United Kingdom's. This is not a case of doing nothing; it is about doing things in a sensible way that does not impose further bills or costs on British bill payers.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): I recently visited a pioneering company in Epsom and Ewell called Sunswap. Its zero emission technology for refrigerated transport is enabling the transition from polluting diesel to solar power. Does the hon. Member agree that such innovation thrives in times of challenge and drives economic growth?

Andrew Bowie: Absolutely. That is one reason why I am so proud of the contracts for difference scheme, which over our time in government supported emerging and developing technologies to ensure that we get the transition right to the tune of billions of pounds.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): The hon. Gentleman spoke of the need to focus on the provisions of the Bill, so will he outline which provisions he is opposed to? Is it net zero ambitions, increasing net biodiversity, or developing a nature and biodiversity plan?

Andrew Bowie: If the hon. Gentleman would have some patience, I am about to turn to the exact provisions that we take issue with.

The Bill states that it is

“to require the United Kingdom to achieve climate and nature targets”

and it calls for an immediate end to exploration, extraction and—crucially—imports of fossil fuels. That would involve not only laying off hundreds of thousands of workers and undermining our energy security, but shutting down our chemicals industry and putting at risk our ability to keep the lights on. The Bill would impose a duty on the Secretary of State to publish annual targets and bind the Secretary of State to take to take “all reasonable

[*Andrew Bowie*]

steps” to achieve them. As we have seen, setting arbitrary legally binding targets with no plan for how to achieve them is a mistake.

The Bill would also establish a climate and nature assembly to direct the Secretary of State’s strategy—a body that the Secretary of State would be legally bound to follow if any of the measures it proposed had the support of 66% of its members. Those members would be unelected and unaccountable, unlike Members of this House. That is not how decisions are made in this country, and it is not how decisions should be made. Laws and decisions are taken in this country by this Parliament, and are introduced mostly by the Government, who command a majority in this House. The Government are held to account in this House by elected Members, and we in turn are held to account by our constituents. We cannot outsource our responsibilities to an unelected, unaccountable and remote institution.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): The hon. Member talks about unelected and unaccountable organisations such as the assembly, but is that not also the case for the other place?

Andrew Bowie: I did not know it was official Labour party policy to dissolve the other place in its entirety—if it is, please correct me; I would be keen to be educated in that regard—but no, that is not the case. As the hon. Member knows, the governing party in the upper House is determined by which party won the democratic election and commands a majority in this House. That system has worked, and I believe it will continue to work well for many years to come.

Sir Christopher Chope: Does my hon. Friend agree that one organisation that fits his description is the Climate Change Committee, which is charged with various responsibilities but has neglected its responsibility to promote adaptation and resilience?

Andrew Bowie: I agree in part with my hon. Friend—indeed, the committee has neglected some of its responsibilities—but I want to make progress on the Bill, which does not address the Climate Change Committee.

Clause 1 would impose a duty on the Secretary of State to achieve the climate and nature objectives that it sets out, as if mere will alone could bring those objectives into reality. One objective is that the UK

“reduces its overall contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero at a rate consistent with...achieving its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) emissions reduction targets”

in accordance with the 2015 Paris agreement. That would entail reducing UK emissions in line with the 1.5° objective.

Clause 2 explains that the strategy that the Secretary of State would be duty-bound to produce and then take every possible step to achieve

“must include measures that...will achieve the objectives specified” by

“limiting the United Kingdom’s total emissions of carbon dioxide, including territorial emissions”

to levels in line with the Paris agreement’s 1.5° objective. What does that mean? The Bill stops short of providing

year-on-year limits for overall emissions, but does not indicate that our current carbon budget system is not sufficient for the objectives of the Bill.

Zero Hour, the climate campaign group behind the Bill, thinks that the UK’s carbon budgets are no longer sufficient to achieve 1.5° and that, once we include emissions from the goods we import, the UK’s total carbon footprint will exceed its share of the global carbon budget for a 67% chance of 1.5° by more than a factor of two.

Freddie van Mierlo: Will the hon. Member give way?

Andrew Bowie: I will not. I have given way a few times and other Members want to speak, so I want to make some progress.

Aligning to the targets, which the Bill would oblige the Secretary of State to achieve, would require even more drastic action to reduce emissions. The Secretary of State has already signed the country up to an even stricter target of cutting emissions by 81% by 2035—something the Climate Change Committee said will require people to eat less meat and dairy, take fewer flights, and swap their boilers for heat pumps and their petrol cars for electric vehicles at a pace that will require taxes and mandation. That is not sensible, nor is it feasible.

Let us turn to the objective to include import emissions in the scope of our carbon budgets. Zero Hour correctly identifies that the current carbon budget system focuses on territorial emissions, rather than consumption emissions—in other words, we count the carbon emissions of what is produced within our own borders, rather than the carbon emissions of products that are produced overseas, shipped in and then used within the UK. Some may think that underplays our true contribution to global emissions, and they may have a point, because if we shut down our oil and gas sector, for example—as the Labour party seemingly wants to do—that will not mean that we consume any less oil or gas; it will just mean that we ship it in from overseas as liquefied natural gas, which has four times the carbon emissions in the production process. We may have reduced our territorial carbon emissions and stuck to our carbon budgets, but we would actually be increasing our carbon emissions overall. That, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) likes to say, is carbon accounting gone mad.

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): Does the shadow Minister recognise that the point he makes about emissions from imports not being counted rather undermines the point he was making earlier, when he boasted about the territorial emissions that were reduced when he was in government, which may be the very point that the sponsors of the Bill are trying to make?

Andrew Bowie: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but how do we get away from the problem of double accounting for those emissions? If, for example, India is counting them as part of its global emissions and we start to count them too, in addition to what we are doing within our borders, how will we ever get an accurate picture of emissions across the globe? If we were to take into consideration the global effect of our consumption emissions and the carbon footprint of what we import, the British people would soon realise that there is no

way to decarbonise consumption as rapidly as possible, as the Bill seeks, without a huge economic challenge, and that is not recognised in the Bill.

That brings me to the next aspect of the Bill: the requirement—not just the ambition—that the UK ends “the exploration, extraction, export and import of fossil fuels...as rapidly as possible.”

I am sorry to say that that is not a serious proposal. Even the Climate Change Committee has said that oil and gas will remain a crucial part of our energy mix for decades to come—something that the Secretary of State and his Ministers have accepted. As we have been saying, turning off the taps in the North sea will result only in higher imports—something the Labour Government seemingly accept.

But even worse, the Bill would require us not only to completely end domestic exploration and production, but to end the import of fossil fuels. Just this week, on Wednesday, gas power stations provided 65% of the UK’s electricity. Just 2% came from wind power and 1% came from solar. If the Bill is successful and we end not just the extraction but the import of all fossil fuels as rapidly as possible, MPs who are backing it will have to explain how we keep the lights on when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine.

Carla Denyer: Will the hon. Member give way?

Andrew Bowie: I will make progress, because I know more Members wish to speak. When the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, we simply do not have the technology available—we do not have enough clean power from batteries or long-duration electricity storage—to meet demand. That speaks to the major contradiction in the Bill: it talks about protecting the British countryside from development, but it would require an incredible roll-out—at pace and scale unprecedented—of renewable technologies, pylons, substations and battery storage facilities.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): Does the hon. Member agree that the investment in and setting up of GB Energy, the location of which is not far from his constituency, will ensure that the transition to clean, green energy generation happens quickly, and that the failure to invest happened on the Conservatives’ watch?

Andrew Bowie: The hon. Member is drawing me into setting out what a great record the previous Conservative Government had on investment in new technologies. I would love to believe that Great British Energy will make a positive difference to the direction this country takes on investing in technologies, creating new jobs and driving the transition, but we have seen no evidence that that will actually be the case. Indeed, every time we ask the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero what it expects GB Energy to do, it singularly fails to come up with a response. Far from GB Energy being welcomed in Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland, it is that part of the country that is being decimated more than any other by her party’s position on oil and gas and our industry in the North sea.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the words “as rapidly as possible”? It is that language, and the measures and pressures

included in the Bill, that will provide the incentive to British industry and to great British minds—the inventors, researchers and developers—to create the technologies and produce them at scale. It will also resolve the issue that the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) spoke about: the bottlenecks that mean we do not produce and only assemble. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the wording of the Bill is deliberately intended to spur that innovation and take advantage of the opportunities?

Andrew Bowie: My problem is that the Government’s position on oil and gas, and their position on the support of our domestic industry in the UK, is having a detrimental impact. The advancements and the technologies that the hon. Member speaks about are being developed by the very companies involved in that extraction in the North sea right now. Of course, everybody believes we need to invest in transition, and many say that we should be speeding that transition up. The accelerated decline of the North sea basin will see a lot of that skilled workforce and investment leave the United Kingdom and go overseas. That is something I am incredibly worried about.

I have much to say on the Conservatives’ record on the environment: we had the Environment Act 2021, the 25-year environmental strategy, the creation of new national parks, 34 new landscape recovery projects and 13 offshore marine protected areas.

Dr Simon Opher (Stroud) (Lab): I have a very short question. Can the hon. Gentleman state the number of onshore wind installations that were put together under the last Tory Government?

Andrew Bowie: The Opposition believe that we should not ride roughshod over the views of communities up and down this country, which is why we were so reluctant to develop onshore wind at the scale the Labour party seeks to do.

Jerome Mayhew: If my hon. Friend looks at the wording of clause 2, there would be a presumption against energy projects of over 100 MW unless there was community agreement. It sounds to me like the Bill reimposes the community ban that the previous Conservative Government had.

Andrew Bowie: I would never seek to argue with my hon. Friend, but actually the Bill does not do that. What the Bill does is set a limit at 100 MW, which even the largest solar farm does not quite reach, so there would still be a presumption in favour of large solar park developments. Shotwick solar park on the Welsh border, for example, is the largest in the country, and it is at 72.2 MW, so it would be automatically approved. That again speaks to the contradiction at the heart of the Bill: we cannot say that we want to protect farmland and the great British countryside while seeking to approve at pace large-scale renewable projects that would do the exact opposite.

Greg Smith: It is slightly worse than that. We heard the debate earlier about the word “and”. Many of these large-scale renewable energy projects such as battery

[Greg Smith]

storage are surrounded by such severe fencing that local nature—for example, deer runs—is severely disrupted or destroyed.

Andrew Bowie: My hon. Friend knows that I am in complete agreement on that, given that a significant number of renewable energy projects, battery storage facilities, substations and pylons have been proposed for my constituency as a result of the plans brought forward by the Government. He is, as ever, absolutely right.

The Opposition obviously cannot support the Bill. It would see jobs lost and moved abroad, and it would see decisions taken out of the hands of democratically elected politicians and placed into those of judicial activists and vague, unaccountable bodies. However, I am sorry to say that the lack of seriousness and the inconsistencies in the Bill, including a lack of understanding of how government works and an ignorance of energy markets and of how an increasing reliance on imports is bad for us not just economically but environmentally, mean that we cannot afford it.

The Bill would do great harm to British industry, undermine parliamentary democracy and consign future Governments to goals that are not unachievable but would be achieved on the back of devastation to our energy, food, national and economic security. It would also not protect the great British countryside. Despite the laudable and admirable aims of many right hon. and hon. Members who support the Bill, that is why we cannot support it.

12.11 pm

Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): It is an honour to speak on the Bill, given the twin challenges of tackling climate change and ensuring that our natural world not only survives but becomes a far greater part of our lives. Those priorities are shared by the vast majority of my constituents in Cannock Chase, many of whom have written to me over the last few weeks.

As others have done, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage), who deserves great credit for using her private Member's Bill to push for strong ambitions and action on both climate and biodiversity. That decision has enabled a huge amount of discussion to take place on those issues not just today, but over the last few months and, no doubt, in the months and years to come. In particular, she has worked incredibly hard to ensure that those discussions radiate out of this place by engaging with passionate campaigners from up and down the country. I have no doubt that that will make the public debate both wider and deeper, which I am confident all hon. Members in the Chamber welcome.

As I noted in my maiden speech, my constituency is best known for its forest. While there is far more to Cannock Chase and the fantastic people who call it home than that, I am happy to have the welcome excuse of this debate to focus on the natural beauty and serenity that it has to offer. The truth is that Cannock Chase has a far more complex and diverse range of habitats than simply a 2,700-hectare forest. About a third of the wider Cannock Chase national landscape is

agricultural land, which I will come to later, and a large proportion is heathland, which is a vital but endangered habitat.

In many ways, the decline and continuing plight of Britain's heathland is symbolic of the decline of our natural world, which we are discussing today and which the Bill rightly seeks to address and reverse. It is often said that Britain is one of the most nature deprived countries in the world, but for us in Cannock Chase that can be hard to believe because of all the natural beauty right on our doorstep. Indeed, no one living in my constituency is more than a 15-minute drive from our stunning forest and heathland. Having said that, inequality and poor bus services mean that the most deprived parts of my constituency are also the most nature deprived. I hope we will bear that intersection in mind as we continue the debate.

When I knock on doors on new build estates in Cannock Chase such as those in Hednesford, which is often described as the gateway to the Chase, people who have recently moved to the area often tell me that having nature a stone's throw away is what drew them to our communities, particularly those who grew up in urban areas. The Chase attracts a huge number of visitors—about 2.5 million a year—which, if hon. Members can believe it, means that the density of visitors we receive is four to five times greater than that of the Lake District national park. That intensity of tourism shows how passionate we are about nature and our instinctive need to get lost in it, but also that we can sometimes pose the greatest risk to the natural world. In my area, it is sometimes said that we are at risk of loving the Chase to death, so the agenda of this Bill and this Government to prevent outcomes like that is very important.

As I mentioned, no habitat in my constituency illustrates this better than lowland heathland. Rarer than tropical rainforests, lowland heath is found on Brindley heath and Moors Gorse, just north of Hednesford, and at the iron age hill fort of Castle Ring in Cannock Wood. As well as being a scheduled ancient monument, Castle Ring is home to a variety of rare habitats such as sphagnum bog and acidic grassland.

The UK is fortunate to have a fifth of all the heathland in Europe, yet sadly we have lost 80% of it over the last two centuries. It is particularly concerning that much of that loss has occurred over the last 70 years, echoing the picture of ever increasing species and habitat loss that Members have drawn attention to today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Alice Macdonald). I know, from taking my daughter to see the stunning carpets of purple heather over the Chase every August, that the cutbacks to conservation work due to austerity are allowing scrub and ferns to creep in more and more year after year.

That is why I was delighted that just before Christmas, to mark the 75th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Environment Secretary announced that national landscapes such as Cannock Chase will be granted new powers to boost nature's recovery and improve sustainable access to these beautiful landscapes. Refining the role and authority of national parks and national landscapes will benefit our rural economy and mean that more people can enjoy spending time reconnecting with nature. It is also

fantastic to see stronger regulations to ensure that public bodies, including water companies, do more to respect and support these precious landscapes.

I am confident that that ambition will be extended to the protection of sites of special scientific interest, of which we have many in Cannock Chase. Often SSSIs are under greater ecological threat than national parks or landscapes because they are more dispersed or designated for a particular species. For example, the Cannock extension canal in my home village of Norton Canes plays host to one of the country's largest populations of floating water plantain, which I have to admit is not particularly special to look at but is none the less an ecologically important endangered plant that thrives in gently undulating waters such as canals.

As I mentioned, farming is absolutely present in the Cannock Chase national landscape, and in my view, there is nowhere better than national parks and national landscapes to see that farmers are stewards of the land and keen to work in harmony with nature. Support must be in place to enable farmers to realise this ambition, which is why I very much welcome the Government's announcement of £5 billion over the next two years through the new deal for farmers, which will help to ensure that natural recovery is taking place on every English farm, alongside sustainable food production.

To the credit of the previous Government, they introduced the farming in protected landscapes programme. Four Oaks farm, near Slitting Mill in my constituency, was one of the recipients of the funding, but it was a very time-limited programme, so I hope it will be renewed beyond the next financial year.

Alongside many Members of the House, particularly my fellow members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I look forward to continuing the work of finding a way forward to a financially and environmentally sustainable future for British farming. For protected landscapes like Cannock Chase, funding streams such as the higher tier of the countryside stewardship scheme will be vital. These bespoke, delicately balanced projects need the expertise of Government agencies such as Natural England, and while significant progress has been made in recent months on expanding capacity and speeding up decisions, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all farmers can access environmental land management schemes and improve sustainability and biodiversity in the best way for their farm.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the hon. Member for giving way and compliment him on his speech. Does he agree that biodiverse farming and biodiverse areas near high-production farms are not the enemy of good-quality food production, but in fact enhance that production and reduce the need for the use of chemicals and herbicides on our land?

Josh Newbury: I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention. I completely agree that we need to ensure that our farms are properly supported and that we highlight best practice, so that it is spread across the country. Sustainable food production and national self-sufficiency need to go hand in hand with that work. We must encourage and enable farmers to be stewards of the land, which we know they absolutely are.

Jerome Mayhew: I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests in relation to farming. While I am very supportive of regenerative agricultural techniques, does the hon. Member accept that yield decreases by 25% to a third when we use those techniques? They are suitable in some areas, but not in all.

Josh Newbury: This is why I mentioned that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is holding an inquiry on the future of farming, as part of which we are looking at this issue of balance and ensuring that we strike the proper balance. The underlying principle has to be that we empower farmers to do what is right for their farm and enable them to make that judgment on the correct balance.

The fact that water quality has been a feature of this debate is welcome. We talk about the state of our rivers, lakes and seas a lot in this House, but there cannot be too much discussion about it. As I am sure is sadly the case in every constituency, in Cannock Chase we have waterways that are rated poor for quality: the River Trent on the edge of Rugeley and the Rising brook. In 2022, untreated sewage was discharged into watercourses in my constituency 254 times, for a total of 372 hours, which disgracefully is typical in this country today. We know that has consequences for wildlife. When I met the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in May last year, it highlighted to me that in just two decades the water vole has completely disappeared from Cannock Chase, and there has been a 96% decline in records of grey partridge. The consequences for those two species paint a grim picture indeed.

A key ask from the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, of which I am a proud member, was for Labour to commit to the 30 by 30 pledge and protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. I am proud to say that this Government have committed to that. Unlike the last Government, we are putting it into action. Through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, the Government are ensuring that water companies will be held to account for the improvements that are being promised in exchange for hefty bill increases, while empowering customers, who for far too long have witnessed the decline in the health of our waterways but have been unable to challenge it directly.

I have spoken a lot about nature, but in Cannock Chase we also have a story to tell about energy. In my maiden speech, I explained that the closure of the coal-fired Rugeley power station had a huge impact on the communities I represent, but that a new community on the now-cleared site will ensure energy-efficient homes and new infrastructure, marking a new era for Rugeley and Brereton. There are plans to ensure that the power station's energy legacy is maintained, with a battery storage facility and, I hope, rooftop solar. On very few sites in the country will there be such a clear transition from the energy sources of the past to the homes, jobs and technologies of the future.

Finally, I will turn to the principles of the Bill. When it comes to the climate and nature crisis, holding people in positions of power to account is perhaps more important than ever. Knitting together work across Government into a coherent strategy will be essential to making sure that the targets in the Environment Act 2021, to which this Government have made an unwavering commitment, become a reality. We all know that we do not have time

[Josh Newbury]

to waste in the battle to limit global temperature rises and avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change and the battle to halt and reverse nature loss. The last Government talked the talk to some extent, but they dithered and delayed so chronically that they did not end up implementing much.

As with the last Labour Government, this Labour Government have set a world-leading agenda on climate and nature. As some countries backslide on international commitments, this Government stand firm in asserting the importance of sticking to our targets and making meaningful progress towards meeting them. Whether it is increasing woodland cover, seeing the return of water voles in constituencies such as mine, or stopping islands sinking into the sea on the other side of the world, this Government will always make our climate and natural world their priority and, on behalf of the people I represent, so will I.

12.23 pm

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): Last week, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and I were invited to see a play called “Kyoto”. [Interruption.] It looks like other Ministers were also there; I did not spot them. The play tells the story of the international climate negotiations in Kyoto, including the pivotal role that the late great John Prescott played in working collaboratively to forge a binding agreement between countries with vastly different politics and that agreed about very little. I found the play so moving and inspiring, and I thought I saw that the Secretary of State did, too. The next morning, I wrote to him, asking if he would be willing to have a call with me about this Bill and how we might be able to work together. I did that because this crisis is too big and too existential to leave to a party machinery whose prime motivation seems to be simply to be seen to win, as we saw reported in the news yesterday.

This Bill was first tabled by the first Green MP, Caroline Lucas, four years ago. It is and always has been a chance for collaborative, cross-party endeavour. It is supported by many of the Government’s Back Benchers, and the Labour party itself pledged agreement with its principles not long ago. If the Government support it today, they will share in the credit of its success. We will all win if the Bill goes into Committee and emerges as strong as possible, supported across the House.

I understand that the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) has agreed not to push it to a vote today, in exchange, it seems, for just a meeting with the Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero and a video, with an agreement to work together but with no specific commitments. That is her decision. [Interruption.] Let me continue, please. That is her decision. I am sad about it, but I wish her well and hope it works out.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot tell you how disappointed I was, and how disappointed millions of people will be, to learn how the Government have behaved. They ignored the CAN Bill campaign for months, only finally agreeing to meet its promoter 10 days before this debate—coming to the negotiation table with almost nothing new, demanding a promise

not to push the Bill it to a vote in exchange for no regulation, no legislation, no new targets. That is peanuts. After 10 days of negotiation, incredibly, the offers got worse—until, late last night, the best that the Government could offer was a meeting with the Secretary of State, a non-specific offer to work together, and a video.

The climate is why I got into politics and I am not giving up that easily, so I have stood up today to say to the Government, “Please, give us real commitments, binding decisions, legislation, timetables and consequences.” The existing legislation to which the Government are working is based on science that is out of date, taking us back to a time when we thought that 2°C was a safe level of warming. It takes no account of the emissions from products and services that we import, no account of emissions from aviation and shipping, and no account of emissions from other greenhouse gases such as methane. In other words, it chooses not to count the tricky stuff and then slaps itself on the back for doing so jolly well at the easy stuff, and, as we have heard over and over again today, it does not join up climate and nature legislation or policy in any way.

So I say to the Government again, “Please, please commit yourselves to real, binding, bold legislation that reflects the way in which the science has evolved since the Climate Change Act 2008, which was groundbreaking in its day but which has now been superseded by the climate science.” If they will not do so, I, as one of the Bill’s sponsors, will take this Second Reading to a vote. If they really think that they can look their constituents and their children in the eye—

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carla Denyer: I would like to finish this point. If the Government really think that they can look their constituents and their children in the eye and say, “Look, we couldn’t help it; there was party politics; I had to think of my career,” I say to them, “Go ahead.”

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I, too, have seen “Kyoto”, and I have spent 20 years attending all the climate negotiations. Given that the hon. Member has spoken about cross-party consensus and the need to build the necessary political momentum, will she show respect for the huge efforts made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage)? She did receive commitments that will enable us to move forward—not at the pace that we want, but together—and I am very worried about the way in which the hon. Member is undermining the efforts that have been made to move forward with this.

Carla Denyer: I do have a huge amount of respect for the hon. Member for South Cotswolds, who has worked incredibly hard over the years—decades—as an environment campaigner, and for months since she first proposed this Bill.

Adam Thompson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carla Denyer: I want to make some progress. I respect the hon. Member’s choice, although I disagree with it and I am sad about it. This Bill has been going for four years and has had cross-party support throughout. The

position of the lead proposer on this iteration of the Bill is to accept a negotiation without specific promises. My position is that stronger negotiation and getting the Bill to Committee stage is needed—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Carla Denyer: I anticipate that I will answer many of the points that hon. Members want to make, so I will make a little progress.

Even I do not love every clause of the revised version of the Bill. I would prefer its climate target to make explicit reference to the 1.5° limit and the UK's fair contribution towards it. I very strongly disagree with the last-minute insertion of a presumption against large renewable projects, which was made without consulting the co-proposers. But the fundamental principles of the Bill are sound: laws based on the science, tackling climate and nature as one and doing things with people, not to people. It has the level of ambition that the science demands. It contains enough positive measures for me to give it my full support, putting aside my differences about those points.

In the debate on Second Reading of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, we heard powerful arguments about how it could be improved, but the House voted for it to progress because there was an agreement that it warranted further scrutiny, including potential amendments. The same applies today. If Members agree with the principles but want to change some specifics, let us debate that. In that case, I ask them not to block the Bill today, but to join me in voting for Second Reading and then to debate together, on a cross-party basis, how to make it better together.

Adam Thompson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Carla Denyer: I am on my final sentence. Let us set aside party allegiances for a moment. We can show bold leadership together.

Dr Savage: I admire the hon. Member's passion and commitment to the cause. I am afraid I was not in the Chamber to hear the beginning of her speech, but from what I have been able to gather, let me take the opportunity to set the record straight. I very much believe that we do need cross-party consensus. I have been willing and eager to have conversations with the Government. I have been an environmental campaigner for the last 20 years. I have tried the placard-waving and I have marched in the streets. That has an important role to play, but there is a reason that I chose to come to this place: to take the policy approach. As the third party, the only way we can do that is by working with the Government.

Carla Denyer: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Member, taking a Bill containing binding legislation to Committee stage for line-by-line scrutiny is not placard-waving. Voting for the Bill today is voting for a liveable future. I hope that is what we all choose.

12.33 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): The climate and nature crises are the defining test of our era and, therefore, of our Government. As a co-sponsor of the Bill, and having co-sponsored it in previous iterations when Caroline Lucas, the former Member for Brighton Pavilion, first brought it to the House, I have seen

throughout my time here the importance of working cross-party. That does not mean that we agree on everything, or that opposition Members or Labour Back Benchers cannot forcefully hold our Government to account; it means that we need to prioritise what materially is best for dealing with the climate and nature emergency.

I have called, and will continue to call, my party out when it is not going far enough or even getting things wrong, but I will also fight tooth and nail for transitional demands in the pursuit of tackling the climate and ecological emergency. I know the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) will say herself that the measures in the Bill are not the ceiling of what we want to achieve, but the floor. As she said in her opening speech, the Bill is not a silver bullet. We are now working towards getting the concessions from the Government they have already committed to, holding them to account, pushing them to go further, and taking action up to and beyond what this Bill asks for.

I do not want to sacrifice the transitional demands that we have won as a result of pressure in negotiation, not just from MPs—in fact, perhaps we have played the smallest role—but from campaigners, who have been pushing us to push Ministers and the Government. I am not willing to sacrifice the transitional demands that we could win for climate and nature—today, right now—and that we could hold the Government to account on delivering, in order to have a vote that would mean we lose those demands. I care about the material—that is why I am in Parliament.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Given that we have strong cross-party consensus, as has been demonstrated today, on the urgency of tackling the climate and nature crisis, I do not understand the hon. Lady's argument that the Government would somehow draw back from measures that they have committed, in negotiation with the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage), to take forward. A number of hon. Members think that it is important to vote on a Bill that will help move us further and faster towards tackling the climate and nature crisis. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) explained, Second Reading is an opportunity to further discuss the issues and build cross-party consensus on exactly the measures needed. Will she explain why a vote on the Bill is not a good idea—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I have a long list of speakers to call.

Nadia Whittome: I have every respect for the hon. Member and her Green party colleagues. I am not here to answer on behalf of the Government; I am here to hold the Government to account, which is what I will be doing. I am also here to win material change on climate, economic and social justice. That will be what drives my strategy.

With Trump's election in the US, his Government of billionaires, for billionaires, and his frenzied pursuit of fossil fuels, it is more important now than ever that we do not pander to his climate denialism and that the UK plays a leading role in mitigating the climate crisis, restoring nature and adapting to the impacts that those emergencies are causing. Our lives, especially the lives of younger generations, will be blighted by those twin

[Nadia Whittome]

crises. In recent months, we have seen fires raging through California, storm after storm batter the UK, and devastating flooding from Thailand to Spain. If this is now, imagine the extreme weather events we could be seeing in 20, 40 or 60 years.

Earlier this month, the UN Secretary-General reiterated that

“global emissions must peak this year and rapidly decline thereafter if we are to have a sliver of a hope of limiting long-term global temperature rise to 1.5°C.”

I welcome the positive and vital steps that our Government have already taken on environmental issues in their first six months, on home-grown clean power, stopping new fossil fuel projects, cleaning up our filthy rivers, providing public transport and retrofitting homes. However, we all recognise—I am sure Ministers themselves recognise—that we must go further still, which is what the measures in the Bill are all about, ensuring that we reduce carbon emissions at the speed and scale required, and that we take the steps necessary to fight the climate and nature emergency, which are intertwined crises that cannot be tackled in silo.

The campaign behind the Climate and Nature Bill has been phenomenal. I am very proud to have played a small part as one of the co-sponsors of the Bill and its previous iteration, the Climate and Ecology (No. 2) Bill. I thank the Zero Hour campaign and the thousands of people who have pushed for the Bill over many years, from climate scientists to academics to medical professionals, and every other person who has raised their voice for the future of the planet, including many in Nottingham East. It is because of them, including those in the Public Gallery and outside, that the Bill has been backed by around 200 MPs, including 90 Labour Members. I also thank those who have sponsored previous versions of the Bill, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield Hallam (Olivia Blake) and for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), former Member Caroline Lucas, and most recently the hon. Member for South Cotswolds. She has worked tirelessly to get us to this point, to push for the measures in the Bill, and to engage with the Government. Thanks to her hard work, we have won commitments from the Government on which all co-sponsors, particularly those on the Labour Benches, will be holding them to account.

As I have already said, these measures are not the sum total of what the climate and nature crises require of us. There is so much further for us to go, but I am hopeful that today will be the beginning, or rather the continuation of a journey that sees our Government work with campaigners for the Bill to take the action that we need. It is said again and again that politics is about choices, and there is no more important choice than our very future. We have to choose to serve the interests of people in the UK and across the globe, and stand up to the wealthy and powerful, who are determined to enrich themselves at the expense of people and our planet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Members should not need to be reminded that speeches should be directed towards the Chair, and most definitely not to the Gallery. I call Andrew George.

12.41 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a pleasure to support my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) and the excellent work she has been doing in advancing the Bill. Indeed, for many years I have supported it in its previous iterations in the local authority in Cornwall. I had a speech prepared to encourage the Government to support the Bill, and I have listened to what my hon. Friend said about the importance of advancing the essence of the Bill. Since then, we have heard from the Green party, and I worry that we are now at risk of playing politics with an important matter. I believe that what is most important now is that we bring parties together with a shared agenda, and find a way forward, rather than generate divisiveness at this stage.

Adam Thompson: We have heard extensively about the importance of cross-party consensus, and I believe we have been having a fantastic discussion to that end. Does the hon. Member agree that in the name of cross-party consensus we should be working together and not just party political grandstanding in favour of the Green party?

Andrew George: Yes, of course I agree. I am a strong supporter of the Bill and want it—certainly its intent—to proceed as rapidly as possible, and for us to make progress in all the areas that have been advanced. We must challenge and ensure that we not only meet the commitments that successive Governments have made in relation to our climate targets, but that that is achieved and reviewed on a regular basis. To be fair, as the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made clear, successive Conservative Governments have made important advances on nature conservation—from the Wildlife and Countryside 1981 onwards. It is not right or proper to besmirch any particular party for having failed in this area; we may well have arguments, but what we want is to bring together a political consensus to ensure that we can take these matters forward.

On nature, we face a significant crisis. I do not claim to be an expert, although I have been a lifelong member of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust and I support all its work. I have also supported a number of projects in my constituency—for example, during the summer months, I volunteer on a butterfly transect in my locality to track the decline of butterflies. Some might ask, “Well, what is the relevance of that?” but butterflies are the model organism through which to study habitat fragmentation, habitat loss and climate change in this country, and the weather vane for how we as a nation are doing.

I have to say that the results of the transect are extremely worrying, and although I am more of a bag carrier and scribe for my wife, it is certainly an educative and helpful process—I would encourage all hon. Members to undertake similar volunteer work in their constituencies to track and monitor what is going on with our wildlife. The locality where the transect takes place is a particular hotspot for the silver-studded blue, and we are tracking its decline there. However, nationwide, in the last 14 years, the common blue has seen a 51% decline, and there has been a 65% decline in the green-veined white. The small tortoiseshell has seen a 59% decline, and the painted

lady an 81% decline. There have been significant declines across all species within that period, and that needs to be looked at.

At the same locality, we have also observed migratory birds coming to the coast and the shorelines of west Cornwall. One that I track and that I have a particular interest in is the Arctic tern. Remarkably, Arctic terns migrate—one would advise them not to—25,000 miles from the south pole to the north pole, or from the Antarctic to the Arctic. They stop over on our shores, and it is such an enormous privilege to have such remarkable creatures stopping by.

As they arrive, a bit like my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds after she has rowed across the ocean, they are met with dog walkers who—this is not through ignorance or malevolence; well, it is not through malevolence—disturb them and make them unable to feed and rest, at the very time when they most need to. We need to address that through legislation, as well as education, which is vital. I do not think that there is any malevolent intent on the part of walkers who take their dogs to the coast and disturb the wildlife in that manner, but we need to engage with the public. Legislation like this gives us the opportunity to engage and regulate in a manner that I hope will bring the public with us to protect wildlife.

Hon. Members will be pleased to hear that I will conclude in order to give others an opportunity to speak. I do hope that before Green party Members decide to press the matter to a vote, they will talk to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds a little more and ensure that we bring the House together today so that the purpose of this legislation can be advanced. That is the most important thing of all.

12.50 pm

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for introducing this important debate. I really admire her commitment to action and to real progress, not grandstanding, because politics is not a game. Politics is real life, and outcomes matter.

As the Member of Parliament for Morecambe and Lunesdale, I want to highlight how the urgent challenges of climate change and the nature emergency affect my constituency, which is a place of natural beauty and ecological importance. My constituency is also well placed to be part of the solution to the climate and nature emergencies, particularly in clean energy generation and stewardship of the land.

Morecambe and Lunesdale is especially vulnerable to climate change. Much of the urban areas of Morecambe and Heysham are low-lying, making them prone to future flooding. Villages such as Halton have already seen the devastation caused by extreme weather. Today, I am holding my breath about whether I will get home—I doubt I will—and what damage Storm Éowyn might wreak on my constituency. My constituency is home to farmers whose livelihoods are dependent on the weather. My farms are mainly dairy and livestock; flooding and extreme weather risk not only business damage, but animal welfare.

The rural areas of my constituency, with land stewarded for generations by our farmers, are exemplars of natural beauty with rolling hills and dramatic limestone eruptions.

In my constituency, we have the national landscape of Arnsdale and Silverdale and a section of the Yorkshire Dales national park with the market town of Sedburgh, the dales' most populous settlement—that is its claim to fame. My constituency is also home to Morecambe bay, a site of extraordinary natural heritage. Its mudflats, salt marshes and sandbanks support a wide range of wildlife, and it is a double site of special scientific interest. Migratory birds depend on these habitats, as other hon. Members have mentioned. That richness is part of our identity and is reflected in the Morecambe town motto, "Beauty surrounds, health abounds."

Nature is fundamental to our lives and our livelihoods. The health of our environment is essential to our wellbeing. Climate change threatens our ability to give everyone a good life.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): I make a brief declaration of interest: my former employer, CPRE, supports the Bill. Does my hon. Friend agree that the rate of climate change that she is describing in her constituency poses an existential threat to our most loved landscapes, our iconic wildlife species, the pattern of our seasons and some of our most valuable farmland, and that a rapid and just transition is therefore essential for rural communities so that we can hand over our countryside to future generations in some recognisable form?

Lizzi Collinge: I absolutely agree. Climate change does not affect just one part of our life, or just one part of the country or the world; it affects all of us, in every single domain. If we are to have a planet that is habitable by humans, we must take action now. As my hon. Friend says, it must be a fair and just transition.

We cannot ignore the risks posed by climate change. Severe storms and rising waters are already threatening our homes. The challenges are growing, and we must take action to protect our communities and infrastructure. Locally, we must be resilient; nationally, we must work at a system level to meet the challenge.

I know that thinking about this can be anxiety-inducing, and I worry for our young people who have grown up with a feeling of existential threat. But I ask Members to reframe this challenge as an opportunity to make people's lives better, whether through warmer homes, cheaper bills, access to good public transport and good jobs in new industries, or simply by ensuring access to nature for all. It is an opportunity to turn on their head outdated notions of nature as simply the preserve of the rural and turn our urban areas into havens for the natural world. I am a sci-fi fan, and in my wildest dreams, I imagine energy abundance and the progression of technology to the point where we are harnessing and working with the wonders of the natural world—the chemistry, biology and physics that nature uses so beautifully—to ensure plenty and comfort for all.

On a practical point, what I love about the current political discussion on climate and nature is that it has moved away from what felt like a morality play about individual choices to be focused on the systematic determinants of climate change and ecological destruction. Back in Morecambe and Lunesdale, our farmers have always played a key role in managing the land and protecting nature. That is now recognised in policy, with support to manage land to promote biodiversity, improve

[Lizzi Collinge]

soil health and reduce carbon emissions. Their work shows how agriculture and conservation can go hand in hand. Last year, the now DEFRA Secretary and I visited a farm in Quernmore that is using natural methods to slow upland water flow using marginal land, which in turn prevents lowland flooding. It also had robot cleaners in the milking shed, which was cool.

How we produce our food is fundamental to our wellbeing and the health of the environment. My farmers are always striving hard for productivity, and they are opening up to new methods of production to address climate and nature concerns. Further north in my constituency, local efforts to protect species such as the red squirrel demonstrate what can be achieved through collaboration. The tentative return of those iconic creatures to our woodlands is a source of pride for our community.

In Morecambe and Lunesdale, we are also providing some of the solutions to the clean energy challenge. As well as wind and solar, Heysham has not one, but two nuclear power stations. Nuclear power has an important role as a low-carbon energy source. It provides always-on baseload energy and is currently the only reliable and scalable technology that is an alternative to fossil fuel baseload.

For those who are not nuclear geeks like me, I will briefly explain what that means. For our grid to work reliably and avoid brownouts and blackouts, we need energy that is always on. Solar and wind, while brilliant technologies, offer variable levels of energy through the day, and our grid does not like that. Also, the demand for energy does not go away when the wind stops blowing and the sun stops shining. There are two solutions to that. One is storing energy. There are problems with current battery technology, although I must shout out LiNa Energy, just over the river from my constituency, which is developing sodium-metal chloride batteries that address many of the issues of current technology, and it let me visit the lab.

Returning to always-on energy, nuclear is the only currently available technology. It provides baseload, but without the carbon emissions. It also provides energy density. It is a good use of land in providing energy. In Heysham, nuclear has provided good, unionised jobs for decades. In fact, Councillor Matthew Black at Lancaster city council spoke just a few days ago about how his family has had connections to the power stations for three generations. His grandad was a crane operator on the build, his dad was a toolmaker—one of many connections that I am sure he has with our Prime Minister—and Matthew was a labourer there in his university summer breaks. I take this opportunity to reach out to Members who are not yet convinced of the need for nuclear in tackling climate change. I urge them to review the evidence, to not be bound to shibboleths and to move forward into the future.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to tell the House how wonderful Heysham would be for new nuclear. We have the people, the skills, the land and the transport connections. *[Interruption.]* I will make progress, as I believe you would like me to, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Finally, I will talk about some of the things that this Labour Government are doing. I am proud to sit as a Labour MP on the Government Benches, because I

believe we are meeting the huge challenge we face. We are bringing forward game-changing legislation to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. We have an ambitious programme of true change for our country that is practically sound and absolutely implementable.

We have been taking bold steps. We have published the Clean Power 2030 action plan. In our first week in government we lifted the ban on onshore wind. We have consented to nearly 2 GW of solar projects and started a solar rooftop revolution. We have invested in modern technologies, set world-leading targets and reaffirmed our commitment to no new oil and gas. We have phased out coal and confirmed that we will ban fracking. We have set up Great British Energy and the National Wealth Fund. We have appointed world-renowned climate and nature envoys. We are showing global leadership at COP29, and we strengthened the energy regulator to ensure that it properly stands up for consumers. In nature, too, our Government are taking bold action.

I would like the House to think about that bold action and join me in supporting the new Labour Government to tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

1.1 pm

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): All too often in this place and in politics at large, what divides us is not necessarily the end result—in this case reducing emissions, halting the decline of nature and supporting nature's recovery—but the means by which we get there.

I have some serious issues with the Bill. I say clearly and categorically for the record that I spend most of my time in this place and in my constituency arguing against the very things that cause nature's decline in the beautiful Buckinghamshire countryside. I spend most of my time arguing against the unnecessary greenfield housing developments that concrete over our countryside and destroy nature. I argue against the massive industrial solar installations, battery storage facilities and substation upgrades that take away the farms next door and have fencing around them that disrupts the deer runs and is harmful and dangerous to nature. So many in this House have argued that those things are the solution to some of the challenges we face, but I do not accept that at all, and I do not accept that the Bill will help us get to the end goal that I think the vast majority of people want to see.

I am grateful to constituents who have lobbied me in favour of the Bill, such as the Speen Environmental Action Group. I sat down with them over the summer and we had a good discussion. I do not think we agreed on everything, but we absolutely agreed on the need for the right sort of action and measures that will get us to where we want to go.

From a legislative perspective, I would argue, as the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), did in his excellent speech, that we already have a legislative framework in which we can work. We have the Environment Act 2021. Almost five years ago to this day, in the previous Parliament, I stood somewhere on the other side of the Chamber and delivered my maiden speech on the Environment Bill. It is now an Act of Parliament, and it has a section explicitly about halting the decline in species populations by 2030 and increasing populations by at least 10% to exceed current levels by 2042.

We have the legislative framework. We now have to allow our great innovators to come up with the real solutions—ones that do not bring about the destruction of our countryside and nature. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who has left his place, give an impassioned defence of an ancient woodland. It is, in fact, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew), but it was a good defence none the less. I thought to myself, “It’s quite rare that I agree with him, but I agree with him on this point.” But then I thought about my own constituency, and I thought, “Hang on.” There is a project that has destroyed many ancient woodlands, not just in Buckinghamshire but up and down the entirety of phase 1: High Speed 2. The vast majority of Members of the 2017 Parliament—the Labour Members, the Liberal Democrat Members, although there were not so many of them then, and the Members of other parties—all went through the voting Lobby to vote for the destruction of ancient woodland in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. It is a position that we all have to reflect upon. As I said at the start, we can disagree with the means of getting somewhere, but I invite every right hon. and hon. Member to reflect on what they themselves have proposed or supported in the past, and the impact that has had on the nature challenges we face.

I will touch briefly on some of the issues with the targets in the Bill, which would have severe unintended consequences. My hon. Friend the shadow Minister set out many of them in detail, but it is worth double underlining that if British industry is forced too far, too fast towards targets it cannot meet, that will simply drive those businesses, those jobs and those innovators overseas. It will not combat any global challenge; it will just move it somewhere else in the world. I cannot believe that the sponsors of the Bill, or anyone else, actually want to see that happen.

Fossil fuels will be needed for decades to come. I have been a vocal advocate of de-fossilisation, both in my time on the Transport Committee in the last Parliament and in this Parliament. My argument is that we have the technology out there, but Government regulation, not just in our own country but worldwide, is preventing us from enabling it to grow. We will need fossil fuels. We will need something to power the 1.4 billion internal combustion engine vehicles that will still be on the roads worldwide after the ban on new petrol and diesel engines in this country. I put it to the House that the solution is the synthetic fuel industry: making fuel literally out of air and water, using the Fischer-Tropsch process.

Luke Taylor: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the number of Liberal Democrats in this place; I think that were a very effective method of de-fossilisation on 4 July. On the point about synthetic fuels, does he agree that the measures in the Bill, particularly the ones to encourage sustainable aviation fuels and alternatives for internal combustion engines, will spur investment in those technologies exactly as he wants to see?

Greg Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. On his first point, all I will say is: not in Mid Buckinghamshire. They tried, but they got 25% of the vote.

To answer the hon. Gentleman’s serious point, I do not see anything in the Bill that challenges the zero emission vehicle mandate. The ZEV mandate is obsessed with testing at tailpipe rather than whole-system analysis, which gets in the way of developing synthetic fuels and greenlighting the great innovators in this country and worldwide to get on with developing that technology. If we put a synthetic fuel through an internal combustion engine, there is still carbon at tailpipe, but it is the same volume of carbon that will be recaptured through atmospheric carbon capture to make the next lot of fuel. It is carbon neutral. It is one volume of carbon in a perpetual circle, yet I see nothing in the Bill that will enable those great innovators to move ahead and get—as some of them claim they can—cost parity with the fossil fuel equivalent within a decade.

Victoria Collins (Harpden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I would like to challenge the hon. Member. This Bill sets a very clear direction for what this country wants to achieve, and that will help innovators and businesses to know where to go, which they were not sure about under the last Government. I would like him to think about that.

Greg Smith: I hear the point the hon. Lady makes, but I fundamentally disagree. We already have the direction—it was the last Conservative Government who were the first in the western world to legislate for net zero by 2050 and who passed the Environment Act. The answers to the challenges we face in the development of synthetics do not sit in the Bill before us today. They sit in other legislation, which I admit I voted against in the last Parliament, but it is the ZEV mandate that gets in the way, because it fails to look at whole-system analysis. Who else wants to have a go?

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): Businesses and car manufacturers said that the previous Conservative Government’s chopping and changing on car manufacturing made it really hard for them to achieve those scientific and technological innovations.

Greg Smith: The hon. Lady makes a point about the change that happened in the last Parliament, but she is allowing the facts to get in the way of a good argument. The reality out there is that car manufacturers are finding that, aside from fleet sales, they cannot sell electric vehicles. Consumer demand for them is through the floor—nobody wants them. That is part of the fundamental problem. If we take the solution that this Bill wants to speed up and put on steroids, the innovators get blocked, and everybody simply jumps on the technology that is available today, which is sometimes not the best technology to achieve the climate and nature goals that we in this House all want to see.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Lizzi Collinge) spoke of the value of nuclear, which is another great example. We should look at the damage that grand-scale solar and battery storage cause to nature. We need 2,000 acres of solar panels to produce enough electricity for about 50,000 homes on current usage, but we need only two football pitches for a small modular reactor that will serve 1 million homes, so why are we messing about with solar? That is the fundamental point we should all reflect on when we think about the

[Greg Smith]

Bill. We must think about the legislative framework we need to achieve these goals and then look at more practical solutions.

1.12 pm

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for all the work she has done and the courage she has shown to get us to this point. I think I am right in saying that she learned her rowing craft in Northwich in my constituency, and the strength and tenacity she has shown today is typical of members of that rowing club. I thank her for what she has done.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak on this issue today, because, alongside the fight against child poverty, it is one of the core issues that defines why I entered politics and how we must act not for today but for tomorrow. We must take immediate and bold action to secure a sustainable future for our planet, our environment and our children, who will inherit the world that we shape today. The climate crisis is the defining challenge of our times, and bold action is essential to combating it. Climate change and environmental destruction are not distant threats. They are realities that we face today, and they pose an existential threat.

The science is absolutely clear: our planet is warming at an alarming rate, and the resultant consequences are dire. As the Met Office reported just a couple of weeks ago, 2024 was the warmest year on record globally and the first year that was likely more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. From rising sea levels to devastating floods and wildfires to unprecedented heatwaves, the effects of climate change are being seen today and they impact everyone.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): Will the hon. Member give way?

Andrew Cooper: I will not, because a lot of Members are trying to get in, and I want to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

I am convinced that to tackle this challenge, we must commit to a just transition, with ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that not only put us on track to meet our global commitments but pave the way for a cleaner, greener future for generations to come. We must protect our precious natural ecosystems. The biodiversity crisis is a pressing issue, with species declining at an unprecedented rate. The World Wildlife Fund reported in October that between 1970 and 2020, there was a catastrophic 73% decline in wildlife populations. It is essential that we not only seek to halt that decline but prioritise the restoration and preservation of habitats.

Anna Dixon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew Cooper: I would rather not, as so many Members are looking to speak.

By safeguarding our ecosystems, we not only protect wildlife but enhance our own quality of life. Healthy ecosystems provide clean air, safe water and fertile land,

which are essential resources for our communities and economy. We must seize this opportunity to drive innovation and create green jobs.

As we transition to a low-carbon economy, we can harness the power of renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and cutting-edge technology. This transition will not only help us meet our climate goals but stimulate economic growth and employment opportunities in sectors that are vital for our future. Investing in a sustainable economy is not merely an environmental imperative; it is an immense economic opportunity. Too often, we hear opponents of tackling the climate crisis present this as all cost. I ask them, “Why would you leave this fantastic opportunity to be a global leader in these technologies and to sell our expertise all over the world to someone else?”

I know that the Government recognise this, and I welcome the action that has already been taken not only to get us back on track to meeting our climate commitments, but to create hundreds of thousands of good jobs and drive investment throughout our country. Removing the ban on onshore wind in England, committing £21.7 billion for carbon capture, approving solar projects offering almost 2 GW of power, launching Great British Energy and delivering record-breaking renewables auctions are vital steps in delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero.

Moreover, we know that the public back action on climate, nature and the environment, with Oxford University estimating support at about 80% globally. Indeed, I have heard people across Mid Cheshire express their concerns on these matters. Prior to the general election, I participated in a dedicated climate and nature hustings organised jointly by Sustainable Northwich and Winsford Sustainability Partners, which have done a tremendous amount locally to raise awareness of these issues, provide forums for discussing topics such as carbon capture and storage, work with local schools on air quality projects, and much more. I take this opportunity to thank them for the work that they have done and continue to do.

Along with people across the country, those organisations are increasingly aware of the urgency of the situation and are calling for bold action. By listening to the voices of the people we serve, we can foster collaboration between Government, businesses and local communities to ensure that we create a collective response to climate change that is inclusive, effective and decisive.

According to the Local Government Association, more than 300 local authorities have declared a climate emergency, and nearly two thirds of councils in England aim to be carbon neutral by 2030. I am particularly proud that our first act as an administration after the local elections in 2019 was to declare a climate emergency in Cheshire West and Chester.

Perhaps there is a stereotype of Cheshire as a rural county full of cheese, cats and “Real Housewives” but, at the time of the declaration, Cheshire West was the fourth highest polluting borough for carbon dioxide emissions, with only Neath Port Talbot, North Lincolnshire and Birmingham ranking higher. The borough’s climate emergency response plan notes:

“Cheshire West and Chester is, in many ways, a microcosm of the UK. Few places can claim to have such a variety of key emitters and sectors located in one area.”

There is a heavy concentration of industry in the north of the borough in Ellesmere Port.

There are some who would have us deindustrialise and roll back on manufacturing or any carbon-intensive process. We have seen the consequences of such action. We have seen what happens when the rug is pulled from under communities with nothing to replace it, and how long it can take for a place to recover. And yet, time is of the essence. By providing strategic leadership, we have seen growth in the hydrogen cluster, investment in sustainable aviation fuel production and the approval of a first-of-its-kind carbon capture and storage facility that will have an effect equivalent to taking nearly 200,000 cars off the road each year. The latter was made possible by this Government's commitment to providing certainty for business and investing in this energy cluster and the industries of the future.

Of course, this is not entirely down to the actions of the Government or the council, but if we set the challenge, lead on it and show businesses that we are prepared to back them, they will respond, as we have seen with industry-led initiatives such as Net Zero North West.

In my constituency, Tata is in the process of developing another world first. For a long time, Northwich has been synonymous with the chemistry of salt, and Tata, following completion of its EcoKarb carbon capture and utilisation plant, has announced that it will build a world-first facility to make the first sodium bicarbonate with net zero carbon emissions. Let us all move forward together on this fantastic work.

1.20 pm

Charlotte Cane (Ely and East Cambridgeshire) (LD): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am an unpaid director of Reach community solar farm. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) on bringing this important Bill to the House, and on all the negotiations she has had to try to secure cross-party agreement on it.

I started campaigning on the environment quite a long time ago. My main concerns then were that whales were at risk of becoming extinct and we had a hole in the ozone layer. The international community came together and we now see that whale populations are increasing and the blue whale has been brought back from the brink of extinction. We also phased out chlorofluorocarbons and the ozone layer is repairing. So when we work together, we can achieve great things. I have been hugely impressed and encouraged by the cross-party agreement—with one or two exceptions—on the real need to move forward. I hope that we will not throw this away at the last minute. We have a way forward that would address a lot of these things.

We now know that our challenges are far greater and that we need to worry not just about other species' survival, but about the survival of our own species. More frequent and damaging wildfires and floods are taking human lives as well as destroying property, farms and wildlife. In my constituency of Ely and East Cambridgeshire, farmers are having to contend with rapidly changing seasons.

Rachel Gilmour: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill strives for that adaptation in farming, recognising the urgent need to develop agricultural resilience and sustainable farming practice, and actually offers true financial support, which would help our farmers?

Charlotte Cane: I agree with my hon. Friend and will come to that in a few minutes.

Wetter winters and drier summers mean that our farmers cannot plant when they plan to, and sometimes they miss a whole crop round. The crops do not fully ripen, so they have reduced harvests. The Ouse Washes flood earlier each winter and the floods last longer, which closes roads and cuts people off from schools and hospitals. Wildlife is hatching at the time it always has, but the food that it relies on is not there, or it cannot get access to water, so a generation dies.

The climate is changing for the worse, and we are already seeing the impacts around us. If we do not take action soon, many parts of the world will become uninhabitable for people, most animals, birds, insects, plants and even most aquatic life. My beautiful constituency will also be largely under water, and as if that was not bad enough, that water will probably be salt water, causing tremendous damage to people and wildlife.

Our fens have been the breadbasket of Britain since at least Roman times. They are also an amazing carbon sink. The Fenland soils group is meeting next week in its fifth annual conference to bring together farmers, academics, wildlife charities, national and local government and various other groups to consider how they can continue feeding the nation while keeping that carbon in our soils and making our soils healthier.

Anna Dixon: The hon. Lady talks about protecting a unique habitat. In my Shipley constituency we have peat bogs, the restoration of which is essential for limiting climate change. It is estimated that the Great North bog stores 400 million tonnes of carbon. The council is doing a lot to rewet those areas. Will she join me in commending these restoration projects?

Charlotte Cane: I absolutely commend those restoration projects in the right place. As I say, in the fens we need the food as well as the wetlands, so we have to do the right thing in the right places. Something I like about this Bill is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) said, it provides support for farmers, so that when they come up with ideas for changing their farming practices, they have the funds to deliver them.

In the interest of time, I will just touch on one other aspect of the Bill that I think is particularly important, which is how addressing climate change and the transition has to take full consideration of the poorest in our communities. These are the people who live next to the most polluting roads; who live in flooding areas and cannot afford the insurance to help them after a flood; and who cannot afford to heat their houses because their homes are badly insulated and they still depend directly or indirectly on fossil fuels, which is very costly. It is so important to have these people at the centre of the Bill, because addressing climate change will help them to have a better life. We must ensure that the transition is fair, that it delivers jobs across the country and that it does not just keep putting financial burdens on people.

Victoria Collins: My hon. Friend's point about bringing people with us is so important. Does she also support the Bill's provisions on retraining, which will help us in the transition and moving forward?

Charlotte Cane: I agree entirely that we need to retrain in order to ensure that everyone can benefit from this transition.

Pippa Heylings: Does my hon. Friend agree with my constituent Freya, who says: “I am 15 and I am afraid. I can do things in the community, but unless we have joined-up Government action, we have no hope”? We have various Ministers here as a result of this private Member’s Bill, which addresses the yawning gap between Departments.

Charlotte Cane: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Freya and the many other constituents I know have written to all of us should be assured that we are working together across this House.

In conclusion, I support the Bill entirely. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Cotswolds for working hard to get concessions from the Government and to get cross-party consensus. I ask hon. Members to hold that together and support the different aspects of the Bill.

1.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): I begin by drawing the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I pay huge tribute to the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) for securing this debate and giving these vital issues the parliamentary and ministerial attention they deserve. I know from my own time as a new MP, back in 2006, running the Children’s Food Bill through the parliamentary process, that it is a very steep learning curve. It is clear that there is much to learn about this process, and about how progressive change takes place in this House. In that case, I withdrew my Children’s Food Bill because I knew that the Government were going to do something later that would implement the things I wanted to do.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Mary Creagh: I am going to make a couple of opening remarks, and then I will take interventions.

For more than two decades, the hon. Lady has been a fearless environmental campaigner. Rowing the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, she understands better than any of us our planet’s beauty, strength and vulnerability to climate change, ocean acidification and global warming—as Storm Éowyn rages across the country, with the island of Ireland under a red alert, it is certainly not a day for anybody to be out on the Irish sea.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the twin issues of climate and nature with the hon. Lady today. As a former Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, I share her passion for measurable, specific, time-bound targets with clear Government plans to underpin them in order to achieve progress. What we can say, and what the Climate Change Committee has said, is that the previous Government were strong on long-term targets but very short on interim targets to get us to those places. We cannot will the ends without willing the means.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister, with whom I served on the Environmental Audit Committee when she was Chair. At that time we were very critical of the Environment Act 2021, and the lack of delivery on a deposit return scheme and a neonicotinoids ban. Both of those things the Minister has achieved this week. That is delivery in action. Targets are targets, but delivery and action are utmost, and the Government are undertaking that on nature.

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend makes a great point, and I thank him for the sterling work he has done campaigning on those issues, not just in Leeds but nationally. He is right that when it comes to politics, it is all about show, not tell. I left this House in 2019, and these are subjects that I cared about even when I was not a Member of Parliament. The climate and nature crisis was what drove me to put myself forward for election again, because this is the place where we can make things happen. I heard what the hon. Member for South Cotswolds said about placards and protest, and about how the art of politics is about governing and choosing.

Calum Miller: It is clear that the Government do not wish to divide on this issue—in either meaning of that word—so can the Minister please reassure my constituents who desperately want to see the Bill adopted that there will be meaningful change in the Government’s approach and, in particular, binding commitments on the nature provisions, so that the backsliding we saw from the previous Government does not continue under this one?

Mary Creagh: I give the hon. Member my assurances on that. I want to make it absolutely clear that this is a long-standing problem. We have heard from both the Father of the House and the former baby of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome). *[Interruption.]* Not the Father of the House—the almost Father of the House. From a grandfather to an almost baby.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): The Minister may wish to reflect on those comments before she resumes her speech.

Mary Creagh: I apologise for accidentally promoting the right hon. Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) to Father of the House. He spoke as a grandfather with passion and energy on this issue, as did the former baby of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East—it is an issue that spans generations and parties. In this debate we have had a tour of all the beauty that is in our different constituencies. I feel that I, along with the Climate Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), will have to go on a massive tour of Britain, to do our briefs justice and make headway on this issue.

I also pay tribute to a late, great friend of mine, Lord John Prescott. We have heard talk about Kyoto; he showed that a seafarer from Hull could be the person who got climate agreement when the talks were gridlocked. He showed that the nature and climate emergencies are not elite preoccupations; it is the preoccupation not just of landowners or protestors, but of every working person in this country, and every citizen of this planet.

I pay tribute to him and share my deepest condolences to his family and friends on their loss. Do go and see “Kyoto” at the Soho Place theatre, and get the extra-special climate lanyard on the way in.

Julia Buckley (Shrewsbury) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that it is vital that we embrace the Bill in order to protect those everyday constituents such as mine in Shrewsbury, for whom flooding has moved from a once-in-100-years event to a regular misery each year, as they pay the human cost of climate change?

Mary Creagh: I agree with my hon. Friend, and she is right that we are investing more than ever in flood defences. I am now going to make a bit of progress.

We know that we are living through an age of extinction, and that damaged ecosystems are less able to absorb the emissions that we continue to create. Last year was not just the hottest year on record, but the first to record an average global temperature above the internationally agreed 1.5°C threshold.

From the Valencia floods to the Florida hurricanes, from typhoons in the Philippines to droughts and wildfires in the Amazon, and of course the devastating wildfires that have left thousands under mandatory evacuation orders in Los Angeles, we saw extreme weather exacerbated by climate change last year. Dr Friederike Otto of Imperial College London called 2024 a “reality check” and said that it

“showed just how dangerous life is at 1.5C.”

This is not somebody else’s problem; this is not our children’s problem—this is our problem. As our Prime Minister has said, climate change knows no borders. It threatens national security and economic stability. Our mission is to end poverty on a liveable planet, so the days of sticking our head in the sand and betraying future generations are over. We are changing course.

Freddie van Mierlo: Many hon. Members have spoken ably of the importance of rivers and waterways and the nature contained within them. Will the Minister continue to work on that issue and address the shameful legacy of the Tories?

Mary Creagh: I am going to speak at great length on flooding and water and the measures we have already taken—I have several pages on that.

Let me say what this mission-driven Government are all about. We know one of our missions is to make the UK a clean energy superpower, including accelerating to net zero emissions while seizing the economic opportunities that come with that. We are back in the business of climate leadership and will restore the UK’s position as a global leader on climate action, delivering at home and working abroad with our international partners.

Wera Hobhouse: I can confirm, having been a Member of the previous Parliament, that I see a transformative difference in what this Government are doing compared with the previous Government. I also absolutely believe in cross-party working. A crucial aspect of the Bill is that it ensures we in the UK account for overseas emissions and ecological damage driven by our imports. Can she confirm that the Government will also look at emissions from our imports?

Mary Creagh: I thank the hon. Member for that, and she is right. The Climate Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), is with me on the Front Bench, and we will have more to say about that.

Let me talk about what we have done so far. In COP29 in Baku, our mission was clear. In just six months, we have lifted the de facto ban on onshore wind in England, consented 2 GW of solar power, delivered a record-breaking renewables auction after the previous auction under the last Government had no takers, established Great British Energy—If the shadow Minister wants to intervene, I would be happy to stand corrected.

Andrew Bowie: The Minister says the auction was unsuccessful on renewables. While it is certainly the case that we did not reach the targets on offshore wind that we would have liked, the auction was incredibly successful for other technologies, including the first ever ringfenced funding for new and emerging technologies, such as tidal and wave power, so it was not an unsuccessful auction.

Mary Creagh: Well, talk is cheap. The shadow Minister waxed poetic about the success of the previous Government on offshore wind. If it was such a triumph, why did not a single offshore company turn to bid? It cannot be a successful auction if there are no bidders.

We have helped launch new carbon capture and hydrogen industries. On nature, my right hon. Friend the Member for Streatham and Croydon North (Steve Reed) has launched a rapid review of the previous Government’s environmental improvement plan. In the coming days, we will publish a statement of its key findings and will have a revised plan later in 2025. We have delivered the Water (Special Measures) Bill to improve water quality and have strengthened the arm of the regulator to hold companies to account where they do not deliver for consumers and the environment. The Bill will put water companies under tough special measures by strengthening regulation, beginning the work of cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas.

Dr Opher: As a co-sponsor, I have been so impressed by the way the Minister and the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage) have talked, negotiated and brought the Bill forward. She asks whether we are willing to act—yes, we are clearly willing to act. Will the Minister ensure that the dialogue continues?

Mary Creagh: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend and will say that the era of grown-up government is thoroughly back in town.

We are showing our support for nature-friendly farming by introducing a new deal for farmers, supported by £5 billion of funding that will boost Britain’s food security, restore nature and support rural economic growth.

On flooding—the greatest risk our country faces from climate change—we have invested £2.5 billion over two years. It is not just about building the defences, because once built, they have to be looked after. Maintenance under the previous Government fell behind, leaving 80,000 properties at risk. In York, the Foss flood defence barrier gave way; it is just not acceptable to have flood

[*Mary Creagh*]

defences that can be overtopped in a severe weather event. We have set up a flood resilience taskforce to deal with the increasing challenge of flood defence problems.

Sir Roger Gale: As one of few who can remember when the dinosaurs became extinct, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her generous remarks earlier.

Is this not about the future of our children and our grandchildren, and about the kind of world we grow up in? Let me take her back to her remarks about farming, as the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is present. We will not save our agriculture if we smother our fields in so-called solar farms and things such as the converter station that the National Grid wants to build on farmland in east Kent. We must strike a balance between the need to get to net zero and protecting our natural environment. It is quite clear that the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are not talking to each other properly.

Mary Creagh: Having had an outbreak of consensus, I am afraid I have to gently disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. Across Government we are in the process of putting together a land use framework—something long promised by his Government, but sadly not delivered. According to the most ambitious estimates of solar energy, less than 1% of current farmland would be used for electricity. Of course, for many farmers who are suffering the effects of climate change, solar farms are an important alternative income stream. The land use framework will set out our approach and be part of a national consultation on how we measure the competing pressures on our land and environment.

We have pledged up to £400 million across the next two years for tree planting and peatland restoration, and £70 million to support nature's recovery while delivering much-needed infrastructure and housing. We have finalised the criteria for land to contribute to 30by30 in England, and we are developing a strategy to accelerate progress towards that target.

In the area of circular economy, we are taking a number of steps to make recycling easier and to ban single-use vapes, as has been mentioned. This week, the Conservative party voted against the deposit return scheme, which they formulated when in government—what an extraordinary position to find themselves in. We will continue to work at pace to restore and protect our natural world, achieve clean power by 2030, boost our energy security, and create jobs and sustainable, clean growth across the country. But we cannot do it alone. Nature, birds, fish and weather systems go where they want, as do diseases, viruses and pollution. We saw that with ash dieback and we see it with global plastic pollution, where we are negotiating to get an ambitious global plastic pollution treaty.

I attended the COP16 conference on biodiversity in Colombia and the climate COP29 in Azerbaijan. There, we set out a range of new commitments, including £45 million for the global biodiversity framework fund. We set up the Cali fund, a new international fund for nature, which will give businesses using online genetic sequence data from plants and animals the opportunity

to contribute to global nature recovery. I encourage people to work with businesses in their constituencies and to spread the word on that.

We are looking at innovative funding mechanisms for nature, such as the independent advisory panel on biodiversity credits, co-sponsored by the UK and France, which wants to scale up high-integrity credit markets and generate more finance for nature. At COP29, the Prime Minister confirmed that our nationally determined contribution would be an 81% reduction on 1990 carbon emissions by 2035. That excludes international aviation and shipping, but, following the advice of the Climate Change Committee, I believe that those two areas will be introduced into our sixth carbon budget from 2033. We confirmed at the conference that at least £3 billion between 2020-21 and 2025-26 will be spent on nature.

I am also pleased to inform the House that the UK has been selected to host the next meeting of IPBES, the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. This is the science panel for nature—the IPCC for climate. IPBES 12, in early 2026, will focus on the agreement and publication of a business and biodiversity assessment. We will maximise that moment in our calendar to have a national conversation about the UK's leadership on the science in this area. It is a real joy for me and my hon. Friend the Climate Minister to work alongside our special international representatives for nature, Ruth Davis, and for climate, Rachel Kyte, who are driving leadership, ambition and delivery on nature and climate internationally as we move towards COP30 in Brazil this year.

Victoria Collins: The Minister mentions the focus on biodiversity in the UK. As the MP for a constituency with four chalk streams, I highlight how unique that precious land is. There are only 200 chalk streams in the whole world, so will the Minister join me in celebrating the need to preserve the uniqueness of nature in the UK?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our chalk streams and peatlands are internationally important. They are our equivalent of the Amazon rainforest, and we do not want the over-abstraction that has led to their depreciation under previous Governments.

The Secretary of State has announced a rapid review of the environmental improvement plan. We will set out a clear path for delivering against the Environment Act targets. We know that biodiversity loss is as much of a threat as changes to our climate. One million species face extinction. Wildlife populations have fallen 69% since 1970. That is why we are resetting our approach to nature and putting it at the heart of our governmental approach.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): The vast majority of our biodiversity is in our seas, 90% of which are in our overseas territories. Does the Minister agree that it is critical that the UK has shown leadership in ratifying the global oceans treaty and signing the Apia ocean declaration?

Mary Creagh: I do agree. We are looking for a legislative vehicle to enable us to ratify the biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions treaty, or BBNJ. I am name-dropping here, but from my conversations with President Emmanuel Macron—sorry about that—whom

I had the privilege of meeting at the United Nations General Assembly, I know that this is an issue on which he is very keen for us to show leadership. People around the world are looking to our country to show leadership. We must not fail. We have the Ramsar wetlands COP15 in Zimbabwe next July; I could wax very lyrical about wetlands, but I will make some progress.

The four nations of the UK, the overseas territories and the Crown dependencies have been working collaboratively to produce a UK-wide national biodiversity strategy and action plan, NBSAP. We submitted our targets to the convention on 1 August and will meet all those targets at home. We will publish the full action plan in due course, as I know my hon. Friend the Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner) will be pleased to hear. *[Interruption.]* Let me move on, very quickly, to parts of the Bill, because I can hear coughing. It is a shame, because there is so much more to say.

We are proud to have set legally binding targets through the Climate Change Act to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We are committed to 13 legally binding environmental targets under the Environment Act, and halting the decline in species by 2030 is certainly very ambitious.

In the proposed Bill, the hon. Member for South Cotswolds notes that environmental improvement plans are not accessible to all, and proposes the establishment of a climate and nature assembly. We agree that engagement with and access to nature provides clear benefits, and we want to help drive action for the environment, including through volunteering, citizen science, and building the innate connection and care that we all have in respect of the natural world. We will design our plan with users, and we have agreed to look forward further with young people and get them engaged in this process, as we did during the climate COP.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Mary Creagh: No, I will not. I am going to make some progress.

We agree that engagement with bodies such as the Climate Change Committee, the Office for Environmental Protection and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee is key to our achievement of these targets. We also agree that non-governmental partners have a huge role to play in monitoring, advising, and scrutinising progress and plans. I look forward to meeting with the Minister for Climate, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East, and the hon. Member for South Cotswolds next week to discuss further how to take this work forward.

Let me compliment the hon. Lady on her work and that of NGOs, academics and partners across the climate and nature space, and on the impressive campaign that they have driven to get a joined-up approach across both policy areas. This will be a great opportunity to discuss the environmental improvement plan review, and to demonstrate that we are taking our targets very seriously. I can also tell the hon. Lady that we are going to strengthen the relationship between the JNCC, the CCC and the special representatives, because the siloed approach to climate and nature respectively is dividing work, and the work happening at an international level should be reflected here as well. We will look at

strengthening data reporting on our consumption emissions, and at narratives concerning the imported emissions to which the Bill refers.

It is often said that this is the decade to clean up our planet. We have a Prime Minister who is determined to make the UK a clean energy superpower and reclaim our status as global climate leaders, a Foreign Secretary who knows that international climate and nature action is fundamental to global security and prosperity, an Energy Secretary who is working in overdrive to achieve clean power by 2030, and an Environment Secretary who has wasted no time in taking bold steps to restore our natural environment. We have a Government who recognise the need for collaboration across the House and wider society, and recognise the foundation that nature and climate provide for reaching our national clean growth mission.

We are truly blessed on this island, with natural landscapes, abundant energy resources, cutting-edge innovation, globally leading science, and the power of people and partnership. While we are under no illusions about the scale and urgency of the challenge, we are confident that it can, must and will be met. We will create a safer, more secure, more sustainable and more prosperous future.

Once again, I thank the hon. Member for South Cotswolds for bringing this issue to the House, and for working—with her colleagues and across the House—to deliver on our climate and nature targets.

Motion made, and Question put, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Christian Wakeford.)

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 7.

Division No. 91]

[1.53 pm]

AYES

Abbott, Jack	Crichton, Torcuil
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Daby, Janet
Aldridge, Dan	Davies, Shaun
Ali, Rushanara	Dean, Josh
Anderson, Callum	Dixon, Anna
Anderson, Fleur	Dixon, Samantha
Asser, James	Doughty, Stephen
Athwal, Jas	Eagle, Dame Angela
Atkinson, Catherine	Eagle, rh Maria
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Edwards, Sarah
Bailey, Olivia	Egan, Damien
Barron, Lee	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Ferguson, Mark
Beales, Danny	Fleet, Natalie
Bell, Torsten	Footy, Emma
Blake, Rachel	Fookes, Catherine
Bonavia, Kevin	Foxcroft, Vicky
Botterill, Jade	Gardiner, Barry
Brickell, Phil	Gittins, Becky
Cadbury, Ruth	Gould, Georgia
Caliskan, Nesil	Greenwood, Lilian
Campbell, Juliet	Griffith, Dame Nia
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Hopkins, Rachel
Carling, Sam	Ingham, Leigh
Clark, Feryal	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Collinge, Lizzi	Jones, rh Darren
Collins, Tom	Josan, Gurinder Singh
Conlon, Liam	Kane, Mike
Cooper, Andrew	Kendall, rh Liz
Costigan, Deirdre	Khan, Naushabah
Coyle, Neil	Kitchen, Gen
Creagh, Mary	Leadbeater, Kim

Lightwood, Simon
 Macdonald, Alice
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McEvoy, Lola
 Morgan, Stephen
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Newbury, Josh
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Poynton, Gregor
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rigby, Lucy
 Robertson, Dave

Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Scroggham, Michelle
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Tami, rh Mark
 Taylor, David
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Vince, Chris
 Western, Matt
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yemm, Steve

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Christian Wakeford and
 Martin McCluskey

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Berry, Siân
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Denyer, Carla
 Duffield, Rosie

Mohamed, Iqbal
 Ramsay, Adrian

Tellers for the Noes:
 Ellie Chowns and
 Jeremy Corbyn

Question accordingly agreed to.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 11 July.

Gambling Act 2005 (Monetary Limits for Lotteries) Bill

Second Reading

2.6 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I hope that those who just walked past the Member about to speak are going to apologise.

Wendy Chamberlain: This is a small and, on the surface, technical looking Bill, but one that would revolutionise charity fundraising in constituencies up and down the country. The key clause is 1(2), which would omit subsection (3) from section 99 of the Gambling Act 2005. The law that would be changed is a requirement placed on charity lotteries alone that caps the proceeds of their sales in any given year. Put another way, if someone is running a purely profit-driven lottery with no societal benefit, there are no caps on the number of tickets they can sell, but for charity lotteries—the most well-known being the People's Postcode Lottery—there is a cap of £5 million per draw and £50 million over the course of a calendar year.

What clause 1(2) would do—indeed, this is the purpose of the whole Bill—is remove that cap and allow unlimited charitable fundraising from licensed lottery sales, because, of course, it is important that the proceeds of the lottery go to charities, rather than just creating bigger and bigger prize pots. As things stand, there is a limit on prizes of £25,000 or, if it is more, 10% of the proceeds of the lottery. The limit is therefore £500,000 with the current cap. All the stakeholders agree that we ought to amend section 99(4) of the 2005 Act so that it reads £500,000, to maintain the current prize levels. My Bill seeks the Government's agreement to that and asks them to exercise their powers under clause 3 to make the relevant consequential provisions. That is the extent of the Bill—two small legislative changes with a huge consequence for charities across the UK.

There are approximately 500 charity lottery operators generating more than £450 million for good causes every year. As I have mentioned, the largest of these is the People's Postcode Lottery; indeed, it is the one with the largest reach in every constituency. To date, the People's Postcode Lottery has coped with the fact that demand exceeds the cap by establishing different postcode trusts that each operate on a thematic or geographical basis, but I would argue that there are three fundamental problems with that.

First, it is incredibly bureaucratic, with each trust having to have its own licences, monthly returns, registrations under Scottish, English and Welsh law, trustees, audit and risk committees, monthly and annual accounts, financial audits, websites and so on. That bureaucracy increases costs that could otherwise be used for good causes. Secondly, it is deeply inflexible, with the funds raised under each trust being required to be directed to the trust theme or geographical designation. Right now, we see Storm Éowyn causing destruction over Northern Ireland and Scotland. If there is damage or some sort of major accident causing loss of life, charities, as they always do, will step in to urgently provide support.

However, the People's Postcode Lottery, for example, would not be able to divert funds to assist with such efforts because of the current rules on trusts, as a result of the cap.

Thirdly, even if we accept the additional bureaucracy and the restrictions on where funds are deployed, at the end of the day, all the evidence still shows that fundraising is being limited by the caps, and in any case, their value is eroded by inflation. It is estimated that if we do nothing and keep the caps today, the charities supported by the People's Postcode Lottery will lose out on £175 million over the next five years. I challenge anyone in the House to argue that the charities in their constituency would not benefit from that funding.

We already benefit from funding in North East Fife, and I would love to see more support for fantastic local initiatives. I will list some of the individual projects that have been supported in the last two years alone. St Agatha's and St Andrews nurseries received funds for the cost of outdoor education equipment and training. There has been support for Scotland's international poetry festival, StAnza, which takes place in St Andrews every year—I am looking forward to March's programme. The Newburgh wellbeing choir, which provides support for people living with dementia, was able to hire professional singers trained in dementia inclusion to lead the group. Nurture Steps had a project funded to run support sessions for parents of young children with disabilities, and Veterans Tribe Scotland was supported on a significant project to reduce isolation, loneliness and anxiety among those who have served our country. There were funds allocated to maintain a community playing field at Dunbog community hall. In the late summer, I hope to go to the Cupar big weekend, which has also been supported by charity lotteries.

I could go on; there are countless projects. For example, the Cupar food bank and local brownie units receive funding from their central bodies, the Trussell Trust and Girlguiding, that also comes from charity lotteries.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I commend my hon. Friend for bringing the Bill before the House and for all her work to promote charity lotteries. Does she agree that, in addition to all the organisations she has listed in her constituency, the MS Therapy Centre in Milton Park, Chilton county primary school and the Letcombe Brook Project in my Oxfordshire constituency would benefit further if the Bill progresses?

Wendy Chamberlain: My hon. Friend has just exemplified what I said earlier. Every single one of us has probably attended drop-ins in Parliament and seen the benefit of charity lotteries in our local communities.

Fundraising is not a one-off thing. There will be other projects that were not successful in getting funding, or all the funding they needed, because it has not been available under the current system. I would like to bring in some of those charities' voices directly. I hope the Minister is aware that before Christmas, over 100 charity leaders wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to support my Bill. They pointed to the absurdity of charity fundraising being restricted. They noted, and I have to agree, that

“supporting this vital reform would send a strong message on the Labour Government's backing for, and belief in the third sector and a vibrant, well-funded society.”

I spoke with one the signatories of the letter, Children First, earlier this week. It said:

“In a financial climate that is more challenging than ever, we rely on charitable fundraising to deliver the essential services we provide to children and families across the country. Importantly,”—and I think this is a very important point—

“the unrestricted nature of the funding means we are more able to use the money in the most effective way for children and families, bridging gaps in the ever-complex funding environment. Many of our services rely on a jigsaw of income, sometimes stretching to 20 different sources all with conditions, data gathering and reporting requirements. This, in turn, has an impact on how much we can do for the children and families we support as time and energy is locked into sustaining funding as opposed to supporting families.”

Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD): My hon. Friend talks about the financial pressures that charities face. Volunteer Centre West Berkshire has said that charities in West Berkshire will need to find an additional £383,000 next year just to stand still, because of the increase to the minimum wage and national insurance contributions. With the Government causing charities concern through national insurance, does she agree that her Bill would allow them to ameliorate some of that harm?

Wendy Chamberlain: Yes, I absolutely agree. Indeed, in a Westminster Hall debate just last week, where the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight East (Joe Robertson), also spoke, I highlighted that very thing: the national insurance increase will hurt charities, and there is an opportunity for the Government, through my Bill, to ameliorate some of that.

Children First also said that it understands that technical barriers place limits on the way that charity lotteries provide funds and that it supports calls to remove the cap. There are about 170,000 charities across the UK. Of course, not all of them want or need charity funding, but many thousands do.

There are many reasons why the House should support the Bill. I understand some of the Government's concerns. I have been told that they are worried about the impact on the national lottery, considering the Secretary of State's statutory obligation to maximise its success. However, I would argue that there is no evidence to suggest there is a detrimental impact on the national lottery from charity lotteries. The Gambling Commission has investigated this three times in the last 15 years, most recently in October 2017, and found no statistically significant effect of charity lotteries on national lottery sales. That was confirmed again in 2022 in an impact assessment by Regulus Partners.

My goal with the Bill is to keep the distinct nature of the national lottery by protecting its much larger prize pots. This weekend, the lotto's prize is £4 million, while the Euromillions' is £83 million. In changing the law on sales, we want to change the current price cap to keep the prize maximum at £500,000. It is a very different ball game, and the Bill supports the evidence that players of one lottery often play the other as well.

I know that the Government are awaiting updated research. I suggest that the Government choose to progress my Bill today and consider the research at Committee stage or later. From my conversations with the Minister, I understand that the Government are determined to hold their current position that they want to see the evidence first. I hope that the Minister

[Wendy Chamberlain]

will confirm the commitment to make the research public when it is received and to update the House on the Government's review of the research before the summer recess. I hope she will then set out any legislative action the Government are prepared to take.

I know that the Minister supported these reforms in opposition and is therefore sympathetic to the purpose of the Bill. I am sure she is aware of the money charities in her constituency have benefited from and will continue to benefit from. The Station House Community Association in her constituency notes the following in a project description:

"this grant has supported our running costs—just like everyone else all our bills have increased and we need to cover these costs."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr Dillon) highlighted, this is an issue we hear everywhere, particularly now that charities are faced with the additional cost of national insurance contributions. Increased fundraising to counterbalance these additional costs will be increasingly vital over the years ahead if charitable projects that we all champion are to survive. The Bill offers a way for the Government to support such charities, and at no cost to the taxpayer. It is a win-win in my view.

Before I finish, I would like to touch on gambling harms. I am a strong believer in reforms to the sector to protect people from problem gambling. Public Health England has said that there are more than 400 gambling-related suicides a year and that it costs the UK £1.4 billion. Extrapolation of this data by Gambling with Lives suggests that up to 650 gambling-related suicides take place across the UK each year. My party wants to see a compulsory levy on gambling companies to fund research, education, treatment, restrictions on advertising and the establishment of a gambling ombudsman.

The seriousness of addictive, problem gambling cannot be underestimated. I want to outline the steps that the People's Postcode Lottery takes to tackle it. Players sign up to a monthly subscription to be entered into the draws. The number of monthly subscriptions for a single player is limited, and draws take place throughout the month with results published accordingly. One of the most influential factors in the development of gambling problems is the ability to gamble in real time over and over again. Charity lotteries do not allow real-time gambling, so it takes away the ability to chase a perceived high. Lotteries are widely recognised as being low-risk games compared to other forms of gambling.

To conclude, I feel confident that there are only benefits to the Bill. There are benefits to the charity sector, which is facing unprecedented pressures, to local charities and community projects, and ultimately to all of our constituents.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

2.19 pm

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of His Majesty's loyal Opposition on this important matter. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) on bringing forward this Bill. She has spoken with passion and knowledge on an issue that she clearly

knows and cares much about. I also thank her for supporting my Westminster Hall debate on a related issue that is particularly important for charities: the impact of this Government's national insurance increases.

The simple and well-intentioned aim behind the Bill is to allow charities to raise more money to deliver on their charitable aims, and the hon. Lady seeks to do that by disposing of the limits imposed by the Gambling Act 2005. She has already referred to the People's Postcode Lottery, and we have heard how much it does to support charities in our constituencies up and down the country, including in mine on the Isle of Wight. Who would not want to support charities such as the People's Postcode Lottery?

The leading argument against restricting the cap on charity lotteries is that they might then compete with the national lottery, which is not subject to this cap. That is a legitimate concern. It is in all our interests that the national lottery continues to thrive, but research has been done on competition between charity lotteries and the national lottery. In 2017, the Gambling Commission found

"no statistically significant effect of Charity Lotteries affecting National Lottery sales."

Indeed, it remarked that the national lottery and society lotteries have continued to grow side by side. Consequently, the previous Conservative Government partially liberalised charity lottery sales and prize limits in 2020. Two years later, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee took evidence on the matter, and its subsequent report, "What next for the National Lottery?", said:

"We do not consider that society lotteries pose a threat to the charitable giving of the National Lottery, in line with the views of the Gambling Commission and the Department."

The Conservatives support the principle of allowing charities to raise more money, including from society lotteries, and reducing the regulatory burden placed upon them. The previous Government commissioned independent research, as the hon. Member has referred to, and she asked some questions of the Minister, which I endorse. Can the Minister say whether the research has been received at the Department, and will she give an indication of its summary?

Before finishing, I will briefly discuss the importance of charities' work in delivering £17 billion of public services each year, without which the public sector could not do its work. This Government bear greater responsibility to support charities through additional fundraising than might otherwise have been the case, because they are taking an estimated £1.4 billion from charities through their increases to national insurance contributions in the Budget. The Government know that will damage the public services that charities deliver. That is why they exempted the NHS, but they provided no such exemption for charities delivering health and social care, charities supporting people who need housing, charities trying to lift people out of poverty, charities trying to cure disease, and charities supporting victims of violence against women and girls.

I urge the Government to act. They owe charities the support and they owe charities compensation for the money they are taking off them in extra tax. This Bill would just be a start. I thank the hon. Member once again for bringing this important issue before the House, and I wish her every success in realising the aims and objectives behind the Bill.

2.23 pm

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for bringing forward this private Member's Bill. We all recognise what the Bill is trying to achieve and agree that the Government should look at a review into this area. I also thank her for her recognition of the harms of gambling. I have friends who are recovering gambling addicts, and I know what a huge and damaging impact it has had on their lives.

I want to take a moment to recognise some of the charities in my constituency, many of which I have had first-hand experience of working with. I had the honour of working for Streets to Homes, a charity that supports homeless people, rough sleepers and the hidden homeless. There is also Action for Family Carers—a speech does not go by without me mentioning young carers in this place—and Razed Roof, an inclusive theatre company that I had the pleasure of visiting yesterday. In short, it gives adults with learning difficulties the opportunity not only to socialise, but to thrive and be a huge part of the community. I look forward to its performance at the Holocaust Memorial Day service on Sunday.

I will quickly mention YCT—another charity of which I am a trustee—which provides counselling support to young people in my constituency. The problem with mentioning charities in our constituencies is that there is always a danger of missing one out—I am sure that I will get an email later. I will quickly mention Livewire, Butterfly Effect Wellbeing, Rainbow Services and, as mentioned by the hon. Member for North East Fife, the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust.

I will talk briefly about my issues with funding for charities, having worked in the charity sector myself. When charities look at getting funding, that funding is often very short term, and funding organisations always talk about new projects yet fail to recognise that quite a lot of charities just need ongoing funding for the important work they already do. I really emphasise the importance of looking at that.

I will finish by quoting my favourite Prime Minister and—controversially—disagreeing with him.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Lab): Which one?

Chris Vince: Members will work it out. He once said: "Charity is a cold grey loveless thing."

We can all agree that we live in a very different world from when Clement Attlee was Prime Minister. The charities in my constituency of Harlow do a great deal of important work—I know that as I have been part of that myself—and I think we all agree that how they are funded needs to be looked at. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, when she can talk us through that.

2.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for bringing forward this motion. Society lotteries provide vital funding for hundreds of charities, community groups and sports clubs. Indeed, I have seen the impact of that in my own constituency of Barnsley South,

where society lotteries such as the People's Postcode Lottery are benefiting great local causes, from DIAL, which supports disabled people, to Magic Breakfast, which provides kids with a meal to start the school day. In that context, the Government have a clear message: we want society lotteries to thrive.

In the interests of time, I want to be clear from the outset that the Government have a clear commitment to update the House on our position with regard to society lotteries by the summer recess, once we are in receipt of the independent research, which I will come to discuss if there is time. We are not yet in receipt of the final research, but we understand that that will be here by the end of next month. I make that clear commitment to update the House by the summer recess—we have had discussions to that effect.

As hon. Members will know, there have long been mandatory conditions and limits on sales and prizes for society lotteries. Those have been reviewed and adjusted before, most recently by the previous Government, who introduced new sales limits for society lotteries, increasing the annual ticket sales limit fivefold, from £10 million to £50 million. Of course, umbrella lottery organisations may also operate with multiple licences: for example, the People's Postcode Lottery currently holds 20 operator licences and is therefore able to sell a combined total of £1 billion-worth of tickets each year.

I acknowledge the strength of feeling behind the proposal in the Bill to remove the annual sales limits for society lotteries. I would like to speak briefly about some of the factors that the Government will consider for potential reform. Of course, we must reflect on where the sector is now and where it may be in future. The current picture is broadly positive, with recent evidence showing that society lotteries have continued to grow in popularity since the limits were changed in 2020. The vast majority of society lotteries are also currently operating well within existing limits.

However, the Government do recognise the challenge for large-scale umbrella lotteries, some of which have multiple licences for multiple trusts, and we know that a small number of those may reach a limit within the following year and that there are costs associated with operating in that way. We do not take this lightly, but it is worth noting that the current system does not hinder overall sales of society lottery tickets for those organisations.

Further to that, our support for lotteries raising as much money as possible is unwavering. We are also keen to better understand how the growth in sales is translating into the investment in good causes. The current picture suggests that higher sales have not led to an equivalent increase in funding for good causes, and there may be room to improve that.

A second element is the research that I referenced. The current evidence and data show that society lotteries are growing in popularity and revenue. The Government have commissioned independent research into the lotteries market as a whole to help us strengthen that evidence base ahead of any further review of limits. This research—

2.30 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed on Friday 11 July.

Business without Debate

PETS (MICROCHIPS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

ANONYMITY OF SUSPECTS BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHING (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

PALESTINE STATEHOOD (RECOGNITION) (NO. 2) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June.

ELECTIONS (PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT (BRITISH GOODS AND SERVICES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

RIVERS, STREAMS AND LAKES (PROTECTED STATUS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March.

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION (NO. 2) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

PENSION (SPECIAL RULES FOR END OF LIFE) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March.

HIGHWAYS ACT 1980 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION (PRIVATISATION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

UNAUTHORISED ENTRY TO FOOTBALL MATCHES BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS ACT (REVIEW) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

NHS ENGLAND (ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

TERMINAL ILLNESS (RELIEF OF PAIN) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

MARRIAGE (PROHIBITED DEGREES OF RELATIONSHIP) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March.

Antisocial Behaviour: Hertfordshire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christian Wakeford.) 2.34 pm

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): There are people in Hemel Hempstead who live in constant fear; people who are too scared to leave their homes, or who fear for their children's safety. Those people are not statistics, they are not numbers; these are their lives.

I wish to tell the House about someone called Tom—I have changed names and places for people's safety. Tom served in the emergency services for 20 years, putting his life on the line for others. He served our community and kept us safe, yet now he is the one who lives in fear. Tom, who lives with his wife and four children, told me that he lives near a house that is used for drug dealing. Over 90 separate drug deals have been reported to the police and, thanks to his diligence, that is backed by hundreds of hours of CCTV footage and photos.

Drug dealing is a serious crime, but in its wake comes a wave of other antisocial behaviour, with the constant, endless noise of people coming and going at all hours, the slamming of doors, shouting, scaring children, motorbikes flying up and down the road, and the incessant smell of noxious drugs. Needles and paraphernalia lie strewn around the area that Tom is proud of—the area he protected for 20 years. Is that what Tom deserves, after protecting our community for so long?

Tom is not alone. Let me tell the House a story about Cassy—again, not her real name. Cassy has an eight-year-old son. He likes maths, football and playing outside. In recent months, however, he has been too scared to play outside, and even if he wasn't, other children have also stopped venturing outdoors. Why is that? Because the communal garden where he once played his favourite sport lies littered with dog poo. People have tried to clean it up, but large, aggressive dogs let loose act as a deterrent to any community-minded people. The green space, once a makeshift football pitch, has turned into a place for people to smoke drugs, play loud music at all hours of the day, and shout abuse at any passerby. Cassy's son, at just eight years old, lives in fear. Due to the ongoing stress, Cassy is on antidepressants and her husband Gary is in therapy. Their son is so fearful that he cannot sleep alone, scared that the thugs outside will make their way into their home.

It is not just drugs and aggressive behaviour, because another constituent at one of my surgeries, Maria, told me of her case. She and her partner, child and neighbours have been dealing with an abusive, unsafe and disruptive resident since June 2023, who has been letting intoxicated people into their building and threatening violence. Rubbish is piled high and attracting rodents, with smashed windows and alleged arson—those are just some of the things that Maria and her family have had deal with.

When considering Tom, Cassy, Gary and Maria, and the other 55 constituents who have written to me about this, as well as the others who are too scared to report their cases to me at all, there is a theme, but antisocial behaviour sits in a grey area. The hard-working police are often not resourced. The council often relays that it is a police matter, and housing associations are often limited in how they respond. Meanwhile, residents suffer.

[David Taylor]

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate. As a neighbouring Member from Hertfordshire, I know that this is an important issue for our constituents. I recently surveyed high street businesses in my constituency, and they said that one of their biggest issues is antisocial behaviour. Does he agree that this issue also impacts our high streets and businesses?

David Taylor: I entirely agree, and I would point to some of the visits I have made to businesses in my constituency because, as the hon. Member will know, there are similar themes. It is a slightly different point, but I am grateful that this Government are planning to bring in new measures to crack down on shoplifting, which is also a big problem and often goes unpunished.

Hemel Hempstead, my community, is in a tough position. In January 2024 we were the worst major town in Hertfordshire for antisocial behaviour, with more than 200 reported incidents. The town centre is one of the most dangerous towns in Hertfordshire. Local stakeholders told me just this morning that Dacorum has the highest number of vulnerable children at risk of exploitation from drug dealers and county lines in the county. The overall crime rate in 2023 was 95 crimes per 1,000 people. Damningly, between 2014 and 2024, the crime rate doubled. On the doorstep and at my surgeries, many Hemel residents have asked me why we are in this mess. I tell them that we had a Conservative Government and, until 2023, a Conservative borough council; we have a Conservative county council and Conservative police and crime commissioner, and we had a Conservative MP.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): The hon. Member's party has been in government for over six months now. What has changed in that time?

David Taylor: The hon. Member knows that I try to work with him locally in a constructive way, and I will in future, but the problems that we have in Hemel Hempstead are 14 years in the making. Some of them go back 20 years, because of long-standing issues. It is fair to point out that the people in charge of those issues at the time could have done more to help resolve them. He will know that I am trying to find solutions together and not point the finger or look backwards, but the numbers do not lie.

It is impossible to ignore the indisputable fact that in the time that the Conservatives were in power—14 years nationally and longer locally—local crime has skyrocketed. They ignored anti-social behaviour, cut our police force by 20,000 officers nationally and took 60p out of every pound from local authorities. Objectively, that is why we are where we are. It is their mess, and people in my patch are the ones dealing with it. In the time that the Conservatives were in power, crime in Hemel doubled. I defy anyone to defend that record.

Mr Mohindra: The hon. Gentleman is being generous in allowing me to intervene again. Similar to parts of my constituency, Hemel has great transport links. County lines is a relatively new phenomenon, and one of the downsides of our road and train network is that crime is coming out of London. Has he worked with the London Labour Mayor to address those issues?

David Taylor: I am doing everything I can to work with the Labour Mayor, but he is subject to the same national cuts in police numbers that we have seen elsewhere. We all have problems with police resources.

As a candidate and again since my election to Parliament, I have been out with bobbies on the beat to see the issues that they face at first hand, as part of the Hertfordshire police ride-along scheme. After seeing them in action, I commend our police. I do not exaggerate when I say that they are heroes and heroines in our community. Thanks to the local police in Hertfordshire, we have seen some progress in tackling the plight of antisocial behaviour. I thank them again for their service. Operation Clear Hold Build in Grovehill and Operation Hotspot in the town centre have brought significant uplifts in patrols and prevention in both areas. PC Beresford and Sergeant Divney from the neighbourhood team have led the charge against antisocial behaviour from the front. They and their colleagues are an asset to their force.

I also pay tribute to Hemel's Chief Inspector Dave Skarratts. He has been exemplary in his role, and today happens to be his last day. I wish him well in his new role with Bedfordshire police. When tackling antisocial behaviour, the police are key, but they need tools and the resources to do their jobs. While many of us flee from an incident, they rush towards it; I ensure, in my conversations with the Police Federation, that they do so safe in the knowledge that they have the support they need and deserve.

I have carried out an audit of the 55 cases that residents have reported to me so far. I have analysed them for themes, and one keeps emerging. Police are just one part of the jigsaw when it comes to tackling antisocial behaviour. There is a role to be played by local authorities and housing associations. In many instances, upstanding residents have gathered the information and evidence thoroughly, at their own risk and expense, and submitted it to the council or their housing association. However, in some cases they have seen no action.

In some instances, the council has refused to re-add them to the housing list because they are adequately housed, yet it has not acted against the troublemakers nearby. In others, communication between police and council teams has been not consistent enough or, in some cases, completely absent. I have had reports of housing associations simply not replying to their residents. All Members of this House have a responsibility to do their bit to tackle this issue.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is incumbent not just on us as Members of Parliament but on all constituents to work together to ensure that our young people growing up have positive role models around them in a community setting, so that they do not fall into a life of antisocial behaviour and they can see a way to get on in life?

David Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for his point. I myself benefited from Hertfordshire youth services as a Member of the UK Youth Parliament, which is sadly something that has had to be pulled back by Hertfordshire county council because of cuts to youth services. That is just one example of the ways young people can be

offered a chance to build their confidence and skills, and is partly why I am able to speak to hon. Members today.

MPs have a duty to their constituents, the police and the many hard-working council officers who deal with antisocial behaviour, which is why I have made it a key priority. This week, I was lucky to have the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Policing, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson), where I raised Hosking Court, Livingstone Walk, Swallowfields and other hotspots across our area. I have also pushed for Hemel Hempstead to be considered as part of the pilot for the new respect order, which will give police new powers to crack down on yobs and thugs with zero tolerance and with 100% focus on victims.

I have been out with police for ride alongs, the purpose of which is to see at first hand what our officers are seeing and understand further the tools they need to do their job. I have had regular meetings with the chief inspector to understand the whole picture and raise residents' concerns. I have also met the Police Federation reps, who are best placed to tell me about the strategic issues faced by officers. I will continue to do all that and more to support those on the frontline facing antisocial behaviour.

I have spoken today of the harrowing accounts of some of my constituents. I have set out why we are in this mess—because of 14 years of dereliction of duty by the previous Conservative Administration. Now, I want to talk about the way in which Labour is working to fix the problems we have inherited.

I very much welcome the new respect orders, which will give police and local councils the powers they need to ban persistent offenders, and I hope my patch will be picked to join the scheme when it is launched. I also welcome the action on boy racers, with Labour giving police stronger powers to seize vehicles involved in antisocial behaviour. The forthcoming policing and crime Bill, which will partially replace existing civil injunction powers for adults, will hit nuisance off-road bikes hard—another issue affecting my residents. I am particularly pleased to see enhanced powers to complement the Government's commitment to restore neighbourhood policing in England and Wales.

For too long, people in Hemel have been let down. The new Government are showing leadership and, as the new MP for Hemel Hempstead, I pledge today to do all I can to ensure that these national changes are felt locally.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (David Taylor) on securing this important debate and on the work he is doing in his constituency. He has very clearly set out the impact of antisocial behaviour in the cases and stories he has narrated. He has also set out how, when antisocial behaviour is not dealt with, it can be an attraction for other types of crime, creating fear in our communities. The story of how children can pick that up was also well highlighted. He went on to highlight the Conservatives' record over the past 14 years and the impact it has had on our neighbourhood policing.

I am responding in today's debate on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson), who I am sure will be willing to pick up further on any issues with our hon. Friend. I know he has had a productive conversation with her very recently in which he raised these matters.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to the lamentable record of the previous Government on these matters. Even after the previous Government belatedly sought to deal with and respond to the reduction in the overall number of officers that they presided over, policing has still not returned to our streets. There are still fewer police officers in neighbourhood teams. The proportion of the public who say they never see an officer on the beat has doubled, and the number of police community support officers has halved. It is little wonder, then, that the types of crime and conduct that neighbourhood policing used to tackle have soared, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead highlighted.

Whether it happens in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire or anywhere else, antisocial behaviour is a blight on people and places. As MPs across the House will have seen in their constituencies, it affects communities in different ways and comes in different forms, but fundamentally this is about respect—respect for our laws and our expectations as a society, and respect for our fellow citizens. Those who lack that basic respect and behave antisocially have to be made to face the consequences of their actions. We need to send a message that we will not stand by while decent, law-abiding people suffer as a result of the selfishness of others.

To deliver the change that the country needs, we need to restore a sense of local pride, and give people the confidence that they are safe and secure, whether they are at home, in their neighbourhoods or in public places. That is why the Government's plan for change includes our safer streets mission, and it is why we have made stronger action to tackle antisocial behaviour a central part of that mission, with a particular emphasis on improving the police response alongside tougher powers to tackle perpetrators.

My hon. Friend laid out some of the specific problems that his constituents have encountered. He will know that I cannot comment on particular cases, but I think it will be helpful for me to share more about the action we are taking more widely. The Government have committed to five core missions, which seek to address some of the fundamental challenges that society is facing over the next 10 years.

The safer streets mission will halve violence against women and girls, halve knife crime, and restore confidence in policing and the criminal justice system. It is focused on addressing harm and confidence in parallel, by taking a whole-system approach. These are long-term aims, but the Government are already taking decisive first steps towards their delivery, including delivering thousands more neighbourhood policing roles and taking steps to tackle antisocial behaviour through new penalties for offenders. These ambitious aims will require a dedicated coalition of Government, public services, the private sector, charities, and the public themselves, to be successful.

Neighbourhood police officers are at the forefront of the fight against antisocial behaviour. However, neighbourhood policing has declined to such an extent

[Seema Malhotra]

in the last decade that many of the bonds of trust and respect between the police and local communities have been lost. We are going to bring back neighbourhood policing and ensure that thousands of additional officers are out patrolling towns and communities as part of our mission to make streets safer.

Neighbourhood policing sits at the heart of the British policing model, and it is a critical building block in helping communities feel safe. We are determined to restore confidence in policing to record levels and restore the vital connection between the police and the communities they serve. That is why we are also working with policing to implement a new neighbourhood policing guarantee, restoring patrols to town centres, recruiting thousands more personnel and ensuring that every community has a named officer to turn to.

We recognise that no single agency can reduce antisocial behaviour alone, and that doing so requires that important partnership. For our part, the Government will ensure that the police, local authorities and other agencies have the powers they need to respond to antisocial behaviour. The powers in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 do not go far enough. We will put that right by introducing the respect order. Under the new measures, persistent adult perpetrators of antisocial behaviour will face tough restrictions, including bans on entering areas where they have behaved antisocially, such as town centres or other public places. Anyone found breaching a respect order, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead referred to, will face being arrested and could end up behind bars. We will pilot these measures initially, to ensure that they are as effective as possible, before rolling them out across England and Wales. These changes are long overdue.

My hon. Friend mentioned the harm that drugs can do to communities. Tackling illegal drugs is key to delivering the Government's mission. We know from the crime survey for England and Wales that people using or dealing drugs is commonly among the top three antisocial behaviour issues for people in their area. The police have a critical role to play in cracking down on drugs misuse and antisocial behaviour. We are working with the police to support and increase voluntary referrals into treatment. Diverting those who use illegal drugs into interventions such as drug treatment services is key to reducing drug misuse, drug-related crime and

reoffending. We support the use of drug testing on arrest and out-of-court resolutions to ensure that individuals who commit drug and related offences are given the opportunity to change their behaviour by diverting them to meaningful and appropriate interventions.

The hon. Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Mohindra) asked what is different since the Labour Government came into power. County lines is the most violent model of drugs supply and a harmful form of child criminal exploitation. Gangs exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money, often using coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons. Since July 2024, police activity through the county lines programme has resulted in over 400 county lines being closed and hundreds of arrests. Alongside that, the police have identified and referred over 800 children and vulnerable people for safeguarding and support, while over 200 young people have been supported by our specialist victim support services provided by Catch22. We will continue to provide dedicated support for children and young people to escape county lines and child exploitation. That goes hand in hand with our manifesto commitment to roll out further support through the young futures prevention partnerships, identifying at-risk children and young people and making better use of the existing youth services provision.

The hon. Member for Harpenden and Berkhamsted (Victoria Collins) raised the important issue of retail crime. As the Home Secretary set out in her speech to the Labour party conference, the Government will introduce a new offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect hard-working and dedicated staff. That is long overdue. We will also end the effective immunity for shop theft of goods under £200. Shop theft of any amount is illegal, and by repealing the relevant legislation we will ensure that everyone knows that.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead and all Members who have contributed to this important debate. Antisocial behaviour is clearly an issue of substantial concern in his constituency, as it is all over the country. We have to grip it and, through our safer streets mission, that is precisely what the Government intend to do.

Question put and agreed to.

2.59 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Friday 24 January 2025

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Plutonium Disposition Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will work with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority to immobilise the UK-owned civil separated plutonium inventory at Sellafield.

Continued, indefinite, long-term storage leaves a burden of security risks and proliferation sensitivities for future generations to manage. It is the Government's objective to put this material beyond reach, into a form that both reduces the long-term safety and security burden during storage and ensures it is suitable for disposal in a geological disposal facility. Implementing a long-term solution for plutonium is essential to dealing with the UK's nuclear legacy and leaving the environment safer for future generations.

Following a public consultation in 2011, the Government at the time formed a preliminary policy view to pursue reuse of plutonium as mixed oxide fuel but to remain open to any alternative proposals for plutonium management.

The NDA has since carried out substantial technical, deliverability and economic analysis to identify a preferred option for a long-term disposition solution, including options for immobilisation and reuse. The outcome of this work recommended immobilisation as the preferred way forward to put the material beyond reach soonest and with greatest delivery confidence.

Following further development work the NDA will select a preferred technology for immobilisation of the plutonium as a product suitable for long-term storage

and subsequently disposal in a GDF. Organisations involved in the delivery of this work will include the NDA—in particular Sellafield Ltd and Nuclear Waste Services—the UK National Nuclear Laboratory and the wider supply chain.

We expect that around the end of the decade, following Government approval, the NDA and Sellafield will begin delivery of the major build programme of plutonium disposition infrastructure. This programme is expected to support thousands of skilled jobs during the multi-decade design, construction and operational period.

While work continues on long-term immobilisation, the NDA is ensuring the continued safe and secure storage of plutonium in the UK. As part of this approach, new facilities are being built at Sellafield to repack the plutonium inventory for placement in a suite of modern stores.

[HCWS388]

INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

Contingencies Fund Advance: IPSA

Charlotte Nichols (*Representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority*): Due to the general election held on 4 July, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority required additional funding totalling £52,767,000 to support the transition between the old Parliament and the new. The election costs vary with the turnover of MPs at the election and were therefore excluded from the main estimate.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £52,767,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £52,767,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the contingencies fund.

[HCWS387]

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