

Thursday
13 November 2025

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 13 November 2025

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

Abbreviation	Affiliation
Alliance	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Con	Conservative Party
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
Green	Green Party of England and Wales
Ind	Independent*
Lab	Labour Party
Lab/Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
PC	Plaid Cymru
Reform	Reform UK
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

*The term "Independent" may denote—

Members who have been elected as Independent candidates without affiliation to a political party; or

Members who have been elected after standing for a political party but no longer have the party Whip in the House of Commons.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 November 2025

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Flood Resilience: Buckingham and Bletchley

1. **Callum Anderson** (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to improve flood resilience in Buckingham and Bletchley constituency. [906279]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): As part of our record £10.5 billion flood defences programme, the largest in history, the Environment Agency is progressing multiple schemes to improve resilience to flooding locally. These include natural flood management projects for Blue Lagoon, Buckingham and Leckhampstead, a property flood resilience study for Buckingham and the Tingewick flood alleviation scheme.

Callum Anderson: I thank the Minister for her response. Last winter's floods exposed how years of under-investment by the previous Conservative Government had left Buckingham's flood defences inadequate, which impacted many businesses and residents in our town. I have had the pleasure of working with the Flood Action 4 Buckingham group and others to ensure that local voices are heard and to identify ways we can act together to ensure we are resilient in the future. Can the Minister advise me and my constituents on how we can access our fair share of future flood resilience funding so that we are not in this position again?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. I recognise that, at this time of the year, there is anxiety about flooding, and I thank him and the Flood Action 4 Buckingham group for their work. He will be pleased to know that our flood funding policy reforms, announced in October, will make it quicker and easier to deliver the flood defences that he desperately needs, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss this issue in more detail.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The question relates to Buckinghamshire, and I do not think any of the Members standing are from Buckinghamshire, so let us move on.

Access to Nature

2. **Chris Curtis** (Milton Keynes North) (Lab): What steps she has taken to improve access to nature. [906281]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Reynolds): I am a Buckinghamshire Member, Mr Speaker, but there we go.

The Government are delivering our manifesto commitments to improve access to nature and deliver three national forests. We recently announced that the second national forest will be in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. Milton Keynes is the beating economic heart of that corridor, and we will deliver economic opportunities and even better access to nature side by side in my hon. Friend's great city.

Chris Curtis: I welcome the comments about Milton Keynes, the largest economy in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, and we are very excited about the upcoming forest. The Wetland Arc, led by the Parks Trust, is another exciting project that spans the Great Ouse valley in my constituency. It will bring significant benefits for both people and nature, improving biodiversity, strengthening flood resilience and creating new opportunities for recreation and wellbeing across the area. We recently got some funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to start the project. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the Government will continue to support strategic initiatives such as this across the country to deliver environmental protection, enhance community wellbeing and expand opportunities for everyone to enjoy and engage with nature?

Emma Reynolds: I commend my hon. Friend for championing the Wetland Arc project in his constituency. Wetlands enhance water quality and biodiversity, and provide effective natural flood defences. As he suggests, we will continue to support initiatives such as these, and I would be delighted to visit his constituency, should he so wish, because it is very near mine.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Over the summer, the renovation of the Centurion Way was extended, and the cycle path now goes all the way from Chichester to West Dean in my constituency. Mr Speaker, you would be more than welcome to come to join me on a bike to cycle the new length. The restoration of this once crucial transport link provides residents and tourists with access to the beautiful Sussex countryside and the South Downs national park. Does the Secretary of State agree that such projects are vital to improving the UK's health and happiness? What are the Government doing to help local authorities that wish to renovate disused railway lines and improve cycle paths and footpaths?

Emma Reynolds: I am a keen cyclist myself, so I might visit the hon. Lady as well. As we set out in our manifesto, the Government are committed to improving access to nature, and I look forward to working with her to do so.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that farmers play a key role in enhancing nature and access to it, but that farmers can

do so only when it is financially viable and their businesses have certainty from the Government. Yet with the sustainable farming incentive chopped, de-linked payments slashed, capital grants cut, the family farm tax looming and a profitability review completed but deliberately held back from the public until well after the Budget, this Government have created a food and farming emergency, and when our farmers suffer, so does nature. What real, tangible reassurance can the Secretary of State give our farmers right now so that they can stay afloat, produce food, and deliver for nature and the environment?

Emma Reynolds: I am delighted to be at these questions for the first time, but I must say that the Conservatives have some brass neck. Under their Government, they could not even be bothered to spend the farming budget. We have got more Government money into the hands of farmers than ever before, and a record number of farmers are involved in environmental land management schemes. We have a proud record of supporting our farmers; the Conservatives sold them down the river on trade deals.

Farrowing Crates and Cages

3. **Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): What her planned timeline is for moving away from the use of farrowing crates and cages in farming. [906282]

The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Dame Angela Eagle): We remain firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare, and will work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards. The use of cages and other close confinement systems for farmed animals is an issue we are currently considering and, as was announced by the Prime Minister, we plan to publish the animal welfare strategy by the end of this year.

Adrian Ramsay: I thank the Minister for her answer. Animal Equality estimates that around 200,000 sows in the UK spend nearly a quarter of their adult life confined in farrowing crates, which are metal barred cages that severely restrict their movement—they cannot even turn around. Some 75% of vets are concerned and research suggests that two thirds of the public oppose their use. When it comes to the animal welfare strategy, will the Minister commit to phasing out the use of all farrowing crates and the equally cruel cages for birds, and what practical steps will be put in place to support farmers with the transition?

Dame Angela Eagle: It is important to remember that 50% of the national sow breeding herd live freely and are not kept in these kinds of cage systems at all, which I think shows the way forward. It is very important that we work with the industry to see how we can move away from the use of farrowing crates and create more flexible alternatives that are available to be introduced in a practical and pragmatic way.

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): So often, farmers are the best conservationists. Many want to do even more to support the environment and animal welfare, but profitability and sustainability are key. Will the Minister confirm whether the Department will consider financial support for farmers to move towards more sustainable and strong animal welfare standards?

Dame Angela Eagle: We are always ready to consider how we can bring about the policies that will be set out in the animal welfare strategy when we publish it. We are pragmatic about how we can shift from outdated systems and modernise, and we are proud that we have some of the highest standards of animal welfare in the world.

Littering

4. **Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): What steps she has taken to help tackle littering. [906284]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): The Government will clean up Britain and end the throwaway society. That is why we banned the sale of single-use vapes earlier this year and why our forthcoming deposit return scheme will drastically reduce the littering of single-use cans and bottles. We are also supporting councils by bringing forward new guidance, including on enforcement on littering and fly-tipping.

Catherine Atkinson: In Derby, we are lucky to have fantastic community groups who take real pride in keeping our city clean, such as Friends of Littleover Parks, the New Zealand Community Association, and the Ashbourne Road Methodist church A2C kids club, where even our youngest residents do their bit. But their great work is too often undermined by those who dump waste illegally on our streets, on private land and on our green spaces. Will the Minister outline what the Government are doing to tackle waste crime, so that my constituents can continue to enjoy clean and tidy neighbourhoods?

Mary Creagh: I commend my hon. Friend's constituents for their important work, particularly Derby city council's Streetpride champions. Their work is supported by this Government, who are committed to helping councils to do more: seizing and crushing the vehicles of fly-tippers; forcing fly-tippers to clear up their own mess; and bringing in new five-year prison sentences for those transporting waste illegally.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): Criminals have dumped a mountain of illegal plastic waste, 20 feet high and weighing hundreds of tonnes, in my constituency on the floodplain adjacent to the River Cherwell. River levels are rising and heat maps show that the waste is heating up, raising the risk of fire. The Environment Agency says that it has limited resources for enforcement, and the estimated cost of removal is greater than the entire annual budget of the local district council. Will the Minister meet me urgently to discuss what support the Government can offer to avoid an environmental disaster?

Mary Creagh: We inherited a whole system failure in the waste industry, from end to end with failures at every level. That is why there has been an epidemic of illegal fly-tipping. It is now the work of serious and organised crime. We have a waste crime unit that has undertaken in the last financial year—[*Interruption.*] If Conservative Members stop chuntering they might learn something. It has undertaken 21 money laundering investigations, six account-freezing orders and 13 confiscation orders. However, I am aware of this incident and I am happy to

meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss it. I understand that a restriction order was served to prevent further access and tipping at the site.

Water Pollution: Kent

5. **Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help to tackle water pollution in Kent. [906285]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): This Government are taking action to ensure that coastal towns have access to clean bathing water. The Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 provides the most significant increase in enforcement powers to the regulators in a decade, empowering them to take tougher action against those responsible for water pollution.

Tony Vaughan: Littlestone and Dymchurch are two popular beaches in my constituency, but they are subject to no swim advisories, which are seriously harming local tourism, residents and businesses. What urgent measures will the Minister take to ensure clear accountability for water companies, rapid infrastructure upgrades and a transparent timetable for lifting no swim advisories, and will she meet me to discuss how we can create safer seas for my constituents—and possibly join me for a swim when it is safe to do so?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for the kind offer, although I might not take him up on an outdoor swim in November or December. This is a really important issue. We have pledged to halve sewage pollution by 2030 and bathing water sites are being prioritised for upgrades because we recognise how important they are for health, leisure and tourism. My hon. and learned Friend will be pleased to know that the local Environment Agency area director has agreed to meet him on this matter urgently; of course, I will be happy to meet him too.

Mr Speaker: Now for somebody who will take up the offer of a swim—Sir Roger Gale.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Will the Minister reassure the House that the shocking release of microplastic pellets into the seas off the channel coast is a one-off and that it has not affected and will not affect any of the beaches around the rest of the Kent coast?

Emma Hardy: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising such an important issue. I share his anger at this appalling pollution incident. The studies into exactly where the plastic pellets might end up are ongoing, but I would be more than happy to keep him up to date so that he knows what is expected to happen and when. The immediate priority is to address the environmental damage and to minimise further impacts. I have been speaking with Southern Water and the Environment Agency about this and would be happy to keep the right hon. Gentleman and the House up to date. I reassure him and the rest of the House that we find this incident unacceptable, and we will do everything we can to prevent anything like this from happening again.

Water Sector Reform

6. **Sally Jameson** (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to reform the water sector. [906286]

8. **Alan Strickland** (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reform the water sector. [906289]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Reynolds): The Government will publish a White Paper later this year outlining our vision for the future of the water sector, making the most fundamental reform of our water system in a generation. We are determined to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas to deliver better outcomes for consumers and the environment.

Sally Jameson: My constituents know the trouble the water industry is in. I have previously raised in this House the matter of bonuses of being given to Yorkshire Water executives in exchange for poor service. What will the Government do to fix the broken regulatory system so that the failures of the past do not happen again?

Emma Reynolds: I thank my hon. Friend for her campaigning on this issue. We recognise the scale of the challenge facing our water system and are taking decisive action to reset the sector. We will create a single powerful water regulator, abolishing Ofwat and ending the fragmentation that led to the abuses of the past. As my hon. Friend refers to, we have already banned polluting water bosses from taking bonuses, which we did early in our time in government with the passing of the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025.

Alan Strickland: It is crucial that the Government have the powers to crack down on polluting companies, but the Environment Agency's budget was cut by half by the previous Conservative Government. What will this Government do to make it quicker and easier to fine the companies polluting our rivers with raw sewage?

Emma Reynolds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Under this Labour Government, there is nowhere to hide for polluting water companies. We have overseen record fines on water companies and are introducing automatic penalties—like speeding tickets—to ensure that those companies are held to account for every level of offence.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): My constituents are fed up. They are fed up of paying rising bills and adhering to hosepipe bans, and of being told to be mindful of how they use their water while leaks go unfixed and water shortages remain. This autumn, people in Mid Sussex came within three weeks of standpipes being needed, despite paying more and more on their bills. Against this torrent of failure, my constituents want to know how the Government plan to create a water industry that can provide for a growing population, rather than lurching from crisis to crisis.

Emma Reynolds: I share the public's frustration with what has happened in recent years, but I reassure her that we will take decisive action. We have already passed

the Water (Special Measures) Act, but we will also be issuing a White Paper later this year and will legislate to ensure that we have better regulation, a better regulator and a better water system for her constituents and those around the country.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): In West Dorset, overloaded sewers and outdated infrastructure cause repeated sewage spills. Rainwater enters combined systems, overwhelming capacity and causing them to overflow. The Independent Water Commission recommended pre-pipe solutions to reduce storm overflows. Will the Secretary of State introduce a national rainwater management strategy and require rainwater harvesting on all new homes and renovations?

Emma Reynolds: I thank the hon. Member for his question, and I look forward to working with him on this issue. We will look at pre-pipe solutions in the forthcoming White Paper, which I look forward to discussing with him when we publish it.

Solar Farms: Food Security

7. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of solar farms on food security. [906288]

The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Dame Angela Eagle): Only 0.1% of land is used for solar, and half of the agricultural land used for generating solar power is still producing food. Solar farms are not a risk to food security. Instead, they play an important role in diversifying farm income and decarbonising our economy.

James Wild: I think the Minister's answer was a bit tone-deaf. North West Norfolk's farms and farmers play a vital role in our food security. My constituents are concerned about the Droves and High Grove solar farms, which will cover 7,000 acres. Why are the Government, and the Net Zero Secretary in particular, obsessed with putting solar farms on Norfolk's agricultural land rather than on brownfield land and rooftops?

Dame Angela Eagle: A very small area of land is used by solar farms—as I said before, it is 0.1% of the UK's total land area. The clean power commitment 2030 will take that up to 0.4%. Our land use framework, which will deal with ensuring that solar farms do not go on prime agricultural land, is due to be published in the early part of next year.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Dr Neil Hudson (Epping Forest) (Con): Food security is national security, and we are in the middle of a food and farming emergency created by this Labour Government's policies. From their heartless family farm tax to the closure of vital support schemes, they are damaging farming's ability to thrive and harming rural mental health. That is only being made worse nationwide, including in my constituency of Epping Forest, by plans for excessive solar development that risk prime food-producing land being taken away. When will the Government stop this senseless assault on our green belt and countryside, and start putting solar in the right

places, such as on brownfield sites and rooftops? When will they start to reverse these damaging policies so that our fantastic farming sector has a fighting chance of being preserved for future generations?

Dame Angela Eagle: It sounds as though the shadow Minister thinks that the entirety of agricultural land will be covered in solar. I have already said that it will be 0.4% by 2030, and it provides farmers with extra income. We have a national planning policy framework that prioritises using lower-quality land for such things. He says that he wants solar power on rooftops—well, we are doing that too.

Biodiversity

9. **Liam Conlon** (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): What steps she is taking to improve biodiversity. [906290]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): This Government are putting the largest budget ever towards nature restoration, with more than £7 billion announced in the spending review. We have taken targeted action, including licensing the first wild beaver release since their extinction 400 years ago.

Liam Conlon: Fourteen years of Conservative government have left the UK as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, undermining our economy and food systems. I welcome the Government's recent actions to reverse this, including the new guidance to protect bees from pesticides and the introduction of legislation to help protect two thirds of the world's oceans. Does the Minister agree that where the Conservatives have failed, this Government will take action at every level to protect nature and biodiversity for future generations?

Mary Creagh: I do agree. I know that my hon. Friend is a great champion on air quality in his constituency. While the Conservatives have pledged to scrap the Climate Change Act 2008 in the face of protest from business groups, scientists and even their former Prime Minister Theresa May, this Government will tackle the climate and nature crisis. I will be travelling to COP30 in Brazil in a couple of days, where I will discuss how we will embed nature into every element of climate action to tackle global nature loss on land and in the ocean.

Dr Roz Savage (South Cotswolds) (LD): This afternoon, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill will return to the Commons. I share the concern of many of my that the Bill seeks to rip up environmental rules to boost growth. Will the Minister urge her colleagues at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support Lords amendment 113, to ensure that development is balanced with protection for nature?

Mary Creagh: I thank the hon. Lady for campaigning on climate and nature issues, in stark contrast with the Conservatives. I know that she will raise this issue during today's debate. The nature restoration fund, which is a key plank of the Bill, will improve outcomes for nature, while unlocking the housing and infrastructure that this country urgently needs.

Hunting Trophies

10. **Liz Jarvis** (Eastleigh) (LD): When she plans to introduce legislation on banning imports of hunting trophies. [906291]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): We are committed to banning the import of hunting trophies from species of conservation concern. My noble friend Baroness Hayman continues to engage with stakeholders to ensure that we can implement a robust ban.

Liz Jarvis: Vulnerable and endangered species, including rhinos, zebras, elephants, cheetahs and leopards, are still being hunted for so-called trophies abroad, and despite promises from the previous Government, it is still legal to bring those items into the UK. Will the Minister give any reassurance that legislation will be brought forward in this Parliament to ban the import of those hunting trophies to the UK?

Mary Creagh: Some 84% of the 44,000 respondents to the 2020 consultation supported a ban on all hunting trophies entering or leaving the UK. Five years later, it will fall to this Government to deliver what the previous Government promised. Timeframes for introducing that legislation will be provided once the parliamentary timetable for future Sessions is determined.

Food Waste

11. **Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What steps her Department is taking to help reduce levels of food waste. [906292]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): We are committed to tackling food waste and ensuring that food reaches those in greatest need. We have a new £15 million fund redistributing 19,000 tonnes of surplus food, and our simpler recycling reforms, which will come in from next March, will cut the amount of food waste sent to landfill. We hope that behaviour-change initiatives will also tackle food waste in the home.

Dame Meg Hillier: Too Good To Go and Winnow Solutions are two food waste businesses in my constituency at the heart of tackling food waste. I know that the Government do not want to put more burdens on business, but the companies I mention have proved that tackling food waste can save businesses' bottom line. Is the Minister considering mandatory reporting of food waste, and promoting companies that help other businesses to tackle food waste?

Mary Creagh: Those are two absolutely brilliant green tech companies at the heart of my hon. Friend's constituency. We are committed to halving food waste by 2030, and we support both those companies. Digital waste tracking will be in place from April 2026, and will be mandatory from October for waste receivers. That is part of tackling the organised crime end of things. Our circular economy taskforce is considering how we can go further and the potential benefits of a mandatory food waste reporting requirement for large food businesses.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Mr Speaker, you and I—and many others in this House—will remember that when we were younger, nothing was ever thrown out. When the cheese had blue mould, we cut off the edges and ate it. If food was coming near to the end of its time, the dog got it. Nothing was ever wasted. “Best before” dates on fresh food encourage judgment to be exercised before food is thrown out. Has consideration been given to making them law, to ensure that we do not throw away good food for no other reason than the date, which has no relevance to the quality of the food?

Mary Creagh: To be fair, the previous Government did something on food labelling and “best before” dates. There are certain rules around items such as eggs, about which we have to be much more careful. However, I share the hon. Gentleman's view. We need to remove some of the packaging, so that people do not over-buy. We also need to teach people more about how to tackle food waste in their home, so that they do not buy more than they need, and they understand that they can freeze things like butter and cheese when they want to buy in bulk and save money.

Water Company Executives: Accountability

12. **Mr Bayo Alaba** (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the accountability of water company executives. [906293]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Reynolds): Under the previous Government, water bosses awarded themselves over £112 million in bonuses. Thanks to this Government's Water (Special Measures) Act 2025, water company bosses who pollute our waterways have been blocked from receiving millions of pounds in unfair bonuses for the past financial year.

Mr Alaba: After 14 years of water bosses profiting while sewage has spilled into our waterways, this Government are finally setting the record straight. In Southend East and Rochford, we have several organisations dedicated to protecting and preserving our coastlines, from Southend Against Sewage to Waterwatch. Southend has not one but two Labour MPs and a Government who are taking decisive action, so I am reassured that the future of our waterways is in safe hands. Will the Secretary of State update the House on progress on the forthcoming water Bill, and will she meet me to discuss how upcoming legislation could address the regulation of wet wipes and their environmental impact?

Emma Reynolds: I thank my hon. Friend for his doughty campaigning on this issue. We are already taking forward secondary legislation to ban plastic wet wipes, which are a major source of pollution in our waterways. As I have said previously, this Government are taking decisive action to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas. We will publish a White Paper later this year, putting forward proposals for fundamental reform of our water system, so that it delivers better outcomes for consumers and the environment.

Topical Questions

T1. [906297] **Pam Cox** (Colchester) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Reynolds): I am delighted to lead the first all-woman ministerial team in a UK Department of State. My focus as the new Secretary of State is delivering the Government's No. 1 mission of economic growth, while restoring our natural environment. I have four big priorities: cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas; backing British farmers and our food industry; restoring nature; and delivering a sanitary and phytosanitary deal with the EU.

Pam Cox: Today I am hosting pupils from Colchester academy in Greenstead in my constituency. They and their families want a clean River Colne. Will the Secretary of State set out what the Government are doing to hold Anglian Water to account, and whether she is seeing an improvement in its performance?

Emma Reynolds: I thank my hon. Friend for campaigning on these issues. We have already banned bonuses in six water companies, including Anglian Water, as she will know, for not meeting our high standards. That is a powerful incentive for companies to deliver immediate improvements and rebuild public trust. Together, I hope that we can rebuild public trust in our water system for generations to come.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Lady and the Minister with responsibility for farming to their new roles. We Conservative Members genuinely wish them well in this food and farming emergency. The seriousness of that emergency was made clear to me last night by the agricultural chaplain of Suffolk. He told me about the devastating impact that he sees the family farm tax having: the father of two small children who took his life because of fears about the tax, the 92-year-old grandmother who has told her family calmly that she will not be here in April because she wants to beat the tax deadline, and the teenager who walked in to find his father's body. The chaplain said to me, "This tax will live with that poor boy for the rest of his life." All that has happened since the Secretary of State took office, and it is happening across the country. Why does she support this tax?

Emma Reynolds: This is a highly sensitive issue. The reasons for somebody taking their life are often very complex, and my heart goes out to every family devastated by these events. I am not willing to make political points on this issue.

Victoria Atkins: I am not making political points; I am telling the right hon. Lady the reality of her policy. Farmers will have heard no answer, no reason and no understanding. It is shameful. With 13 days to go until the Budget, let me point out that there are enormous economic costs, too. Millions of advisers, businesses and constituents, the 10 largest supermarket chains, multiple food manufacturers, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Welsh Affairs Committee think that this is a bad tax, badly done. The Conservatives will axe this tax. Given that the Secretary of State has admitted this week that Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have "made mistakes" this year, will she finally admit that the family farm and family business taxes are some of those mistakes?

Emma Reynolds: I live in a rural area, represent a semi-rural seat, and have 89 farms in my constituency. I understand the pressures that farmers are under, but the catastrophic mistake made by the previous Government was that they could not even be bothered to spend the farming budget. We have put more Government money in the hands of more farmers than ever before, and we have put a record number of farmers in the environmental land management schemes. We will soon publish the Batters review on farm profitability. We are not keeping that review under wraps, by the way; the House will soon hear more about it. The Conservatives did nothing on the issue when they were in power. We have appointed the nation's first tenant farming commissioner, and we will set out a 25-year road map for farming next year.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Those were very important opening statements, but these are topical questions. We have about five minutes to go, and some Members will not get in now, so I do not know why they are standing to catch my eye.

T4. [906300] **Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab):** Much of Erewash is on a floodplain, so the Flood Re scheme is an enormous help to my constituents, particularly those who were catastrophically affected by Storm Babet in 2023. However, local businesses have told me that there is no similar scheme to support their properties. What steps is the Minister taking to support businesses that are struggling after severe flooding episodes?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. I share his concern about the ability of local businesses to recover from flood events. The Government are investing £10.5 billion to better protect 900,000 properties around the country. The flood resilience taskforce will look into what more can be done to support homes and businesses during the recovery period after flooding.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State, and the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle), to their roles. I look forward to working with them both.

Research from the University of Cumbria shows that, by this time next year, the average hill farmer will earn barely half the national minimum wage, yet the Government's family farm tax means an annual tax bill of £20,000 a year for the typical hill farm. Those farmers will have to stop farming and sell up. To whom? To wealthy landowners and big city corporations. Is this policy not deeply socially unjust, robbing from the poor and giving to the rich, while betraying the people who care for our landscape and provide food for us?

The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Dame Angela Eagle): We will publish the farming road map and the Batters review, and then talk about a strategy for making farming more productive, profitable and sustainable for the next generation. Upland farmers will play an important part in that review, and we will see what we can do to support them.

T5. [906301] **Peter Lamb** (Crawley) (Lab): Crawley has the worst air quality in Sussex, yet under the previous Government, a new incinerator on the town's border was approved; the town will be directly in its plume. In the context of incinerators, will the Minister set out how we can enhance air quality, and will the Government consider a moratorium on the building of new incinerators, given the oversupply in incinerator capacity?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for ensuring good air quality for residents of his constituency. We have published strict criteria for incineration projects, and will back only new waste incineration projects that meet strict conditions. I am happy to meet him to talk about the project in his constituency.

T2. [906298] **Rachel Gilmour** (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): Under the previous Government, farms were encouraged to diversify to secure their incomes and support rural communities. In the light of this Government's reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief, many family farms that diversified now face what feels like double taxation—once during business life, and once on succession. Ahead of the Budget, will the Minister urgently press Treasury colleagues to reverse those reforms?

Dame Angela Eagle: Again, we understand the pressures that farmers are under. We want to work on creating a productive, profitable and sustainable farming sector, and we will do so.

T8. [906304] **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): What support can the Minister offer the Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust, which seeks to open up canal access to the hidden gem at Wren's Nest, which is part of the UNESCO geopark? That would help boost sustainable tourism, give access to residents, and highlight the site's international geological significance.

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is an incredible champion for her constituency. I have heard that people visiting the area can pick up fossils and see what an ecological wonder it is. It looks incredibly beautiful. We know that access to water is important to boosting wellbeing and mental health. I look forward to hearing more about those plans as they develop.

T3. [906299] **Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): Catastrophic failures at Southern Water's water treatment works in Eastbourne have led to extensive sewage discharges, a stench stinking out our town, and, a matter of days ago, the accidental discharge of millions of plastic bio-beads into our sea. Will the Minister urgently meet me to discuss how we can force Southern Water to finally get a grip of its appalling failures at our water treatment works?

Emma Reynolds: Like the hon. Member, I am appalled by this plastic pollution incident, which affects his constituency, nearby constituencies and Camber Sands. We are holding Southern Water to account. There needs to be a thorough investigation of what happened, and as has been said by the Minister with responsibility for water and flooding, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice (Emma Hardy)

—she has been in touch with both the water company and the Environment Agency—the immediate priority is to address the damage caused, but we need to ask questions about why this was not uncovered earlier. The water Minister or I would be happy to meet him.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Given the Government's focus on strengthening skills in the agritech food sector, will the Secretary of State join me in visiting Harper Adams University's new Telford facility at the Quad to see how the industry and higher and further education facilities, including Telford College, are working together to develop and diversify the skills pipeline in the sector?

Dame Angela Eagle: We are fully supportive of collaboration between industry and higher and further education to strengthen skills in the agrifood sector. I will be visiting Harper Adams; that visit is already in the diary, and if my hon. Friend wants to join me, he is more than welcome.

T6. [906302] **Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): What enforcement action is the Environment Agency taking against Viridor, the operator of the Beddington energy recovery facility, due to 18 months of exceedances of daily limits of NOx? Can the Minister also confirm that the permit increase request for the ERF will finally be refused?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important issue. He will know that there is live enforcement action ongoing, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on specific details, but if he wants to have a private conversation, I would be happy to arrange one.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I thank the water Minister for meeting me recently to talk about the issues on Tapton Terrace and on the River Hipper in my constituency. We are grateful for the money she has found for the plans to look into this, but can she tell us how we can speed this up? There is great impatience about getting people on Tapton Terrace protected.

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend raises a really important issue, and I know how deeply felt the loss is in his constituency. I hope he recognises how seriously I am taking this. Of course, I will do everything I can to support him with this.

T7. [906303] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Why has capital investment in agriculture collapsed? It is the family farm tax, isn't it?

Dame Angela Eagle: No, it is not the family farm tax. The right hon. Gentleman should be patient and wait to see our plan for the future of farming.

SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Solicitor General was asked—

Serious Fraud Office: Economic Crime

1. **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Serious Fraud Office's work in tackling serious economic crime. [906305]

The Solicitor General (Ellie Reeves): Since April 2020, the SFO has recovered over £550 million from criminals for the UK taxpayer, but this Government want to go further and are investing millions in expanding the SFO's capabilities. Under our plan for change, we will crack down on fraud and ensure that crime does not pay.

Rachel Hopkins: I welcome the Serious Fraud Office's first use of an unexplained wealth order to return more than £1 million that had been stolen from the public. How will the Solicitor General support efforts to expand the use of unexplained wealth orders to target those criminals who have defrauded innocent victims?

The Solicitor General: On 9 September, the Serious Fraud Office secured £1.1 million from the sale of a Lake district house in an investigation involving its first use of an unexplained wealth order, connected to the assets of the wife of convicted fraudster Timothy Schools. This innovative use of the legislation showcases the SFO's resolve to pursue criminal assets wherever they are hidden and explore new methods to recover funds for victims and the public purse.

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): One way the Serious Fraud Office can be made more effective is through access to more registers of beneficial overseas interests. We know that fraudsters, tax dodgers and crooks are exploiting the financial secrecy in those territories to hide their ill-gotten gains. Does the Solicitor General agree that this would empower the Serious Fraud Office to secure more prosecutions for economic crime, get dodged taxes back to the Treasury and let us invest more in public services in North Norfolk?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful for that question. The Serious Fraud Office is constantly looking at ways to clamp down on fraud and economic crime. For example, the SFO is committed to working more closely with French and Swiss partners through the international anti-corruption prosecutorial taskforce, to ensure that we are robustly tackling cross-border economic crime, and to protect our future prosperity as part of our plan for change.

Rural Crime

2. **John Whitby (Derbyshire Dales) (Lab):** What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for rural crime. [906306]

9. **John Milne (Horsham) (LD):** What steps she is taking to help ensure the effective prosecution of rural crime. [906315]

The Solicitor General: Rural crime can destroy our landscapes, jeopardise businesses and, over time, break down communities. This Government are committed to cracking down on crime and disorder in rural areas, through tougher powers on antisocial behaviour, farm theft, and fly-tipping. The Crown Prosecution Service has appointed a national rural crime lead, and last month it brought together prosecutors from across the country to ensure a co-ordinated approach to prosecution.

John Whitby: In Derbyshire we have seen a significant increase in reports of agricultural crime; police figures show a 45% increase in the past 12 months. Earlier this

year one of my constituents, Jane Bassett, had her farm broken into and a significant amount of specialised equipment was stolen. Such attacks can be traumatic for victims due to how isolated many farms are, and farms are targets for criminals due to their high-value equipment. What steps are being taken to ensure that those who target our hard-working farmers and their equipment and machinery are successfully prosecuted?

The Solicitor General: I am sorry to hear about the terrible experience of my hon. Friend's constituent, and I recognise the significant impact that the theft of equipment has on farmers, both financially and on their wellbeing. The Government recently announced an £800,000 funding boost for the national rural crime unit and national wildlife crime unit. Those dedicated police units will increase collaboration across police forces, and harness the latest technology and data to target the serious organised crime groups that are involved in farm equipment theft.

John Milne: Earlier this year I carried out a survey among farmers in my constituency, who said that they did not bother to report over a third of rural crimes because they felt that not enough happened when they did so. I would not say that nothing has been done, because we now have a specialist rural crime unit across Sussex, but there is an issue with police call centres and staff who do not appear to understand rural issues. Will the Solicitor General look at improving training at call centres in my constituency and across the country?

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important issue. I will certainly pick up the issue of police response with Home Office colleagues. The Government are committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023, which aims to prevent the theft and resale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting. The National Police Chiefs' Council wildlife and rural crime strategy provides a framework through which policing and its partners can work together, to tackle the most prevalent threats and emerging issues that predominantly affect rural communities.

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

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend says, these days rural crime is often organised crime. A lot of that is county lines, which by its nature is cross-jurisdictional and involves different parts of the CPS and different police forces. What is she doing to ensure co-ordination to tackle those types of offences, because as far as criminals are concerned, this is a national enterprise?

The Solicitor General: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point about county lines. The CPS has significantly increased its provision of early advice for county lines cases, working with law enforcement to ensure that all cases are as strong as possible. The CPS has prosecution guidance on county lines, which provides an overview of the approach to be taken in criminal investigations and prosecutions, as well as practical advice on decision making in gang-related offences and on building the strongest possible case.

The Crime and Policing Bill will introduce two new offences that are relevant in this area: those of child criminal exploitation and cuckooing.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Rural and farm crime is a big problem in my constituency in the Scottish Borders which operates across the border between Scotland and England. What discussions has the Solicitor General had with authorities in Scotland to ensure higher prosecution rates for those operating cross-border?

The Solicitor General: I set out some of the measures that this Government are taking to tackle rural crime, but I am happy to take up that issue with the Secretary of State for Scotland to see what more cross-border work can be done.

Support for Victims of Crime

3. **Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): What steps she has taken with the Crown Prosecution Service to support victims of crime. [906307]

7. **Jas Athwal** (Ilford South) (Lab): What steps she is taking with the Crown Prosecution Service to support the experience of victims in the criminal justice system. [906312]

The Solicitor General: This Government place the experience of victims at the very heart of the justice system and are determined to restore their faith in the system. I want to acknowledge the sad passing of Baroness Newlove, who worked tirelessly for victims. Through its victim transformation programme, the CPS is reshaping its service to victims. I recently visited a rape and serious sexual offences—RASSO—unit in the west midlands and heard first hand about the work that victim liaison officers do to offer crucial support. I am pleased that the service is now being piloted to victims of domestic abuse as well.

Shockat Adam: A constituent contacted me in a severe state of distress, understandably, because she is a victim of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, her distress is compounded by the fact that her criminal trial date has been postponed not once but twice, while her perpetrator is walking free in her neighbourhood. This is causing her immense anxiety and impacting her mental health. Will the Solicitor General outline what support the justice system can give to my constituent and other victims of severe sexual violence, especially given long court delays, and what steps she will take to ensure that no victim is left to feel abandoned by the system again?

The Solicitor General: I am very sorry to hear about the experience of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, and I am sure our thoughts are with them. This Government inherited a justice system in crisis, with a record and rising Crown court caseload. Next year, we will fund the Crown courts to run at record levels to tackle the outstanding caseload, by funding 110,000 sitting days. The independent review of the criminal courts considered how to improve overall criminal court efficiency to provide swifter justice for victims, including victims of sexual offences. The CPS has introduced victim liaison officers in RASSO units to offer extra support to victims, particularly when they are facing delays to their trials.

Jas Athwal: I welcome the Government's ambitious mission to reduce violence against women and girls. Many survivors who experience sexual assault will never go to the police or press charges due to appallingly low conviction rates and fears of being retraumatised during court proceedings. Given the alarming statistic that one in four women over the age of 16 have been sexually assaulted, what steps are the Government taking to make reporting and pressing charges a more realistic prospect for survivors?

The Solicitor General: This Government are committed to halving violence against women and girls, and that is my No. 1 priority as Solicitor General. The barriers that victims of rape and serious sexual violence face in this country are unacceptable, and the CPS is committed to improving its performance. These efforts are beginning to have an impact. Referral volumes for adult rape are on a sustained upward trend, and in the last quarter conviction volumes were at their highest level since 2016.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): Given that over recent months we have discovered that the whole country has been a victim of crime from foreign espionage, state aggression and any number of different forms of hostile activity, will the Attorney General be kind enough to give a statement explaining how he is actually representing our interests, rather than preaching to us about how the law does not defend us and we just need to take it?

The Solicitor General: I answered an urgent question in this House a few weeks ago on the China case, which I expect the right hon. Gentleman is referring to. The Government have already made it clear that they are deeply disappointed in the outcome of that case. As has already been confirmed by the CPS and senior Treasury counsel, the decision to offer no evidence in the case was made by the CPS without political influence, including from me or any other Law Officer. As the Attorney General has outlined in some detail in evidence he gave in a recent Committee hearing, where a case can no longer proceed because of evidential reasons, as happened in this case, the requirement is that the CPS informs the Attorney General of the decision as soon as it is taken.

Pam Cox (Colchester) (Lab): Victims in the criminal justice system deserve to be kept fully informed of developments in their case. Can the Solicitor General set out how she is working with the Crown Prosecution Service to improve those communications for victims? I note again the very valuable work in this space of Baroness Newlove, the former Victims' Commissioner.

The Solicitor General: The issue of support for victims is particularly fresh in my mind, as I visited one of the CPS's rape and serious sexual offences units in the west midlands just a few weeks ago. I heard at first hand about the important work that victim liaison officers in the CPS are doing to support victims through their experience of the criminal justice system—on which I have pressed the CPS. It is ensuring that its communications with victims are of the highest possible standard—that letters have empathy and are the best that they possibly can be. I will continue to monitor that closely.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): I welcome the Solicitor General to her place. Domestic abuse survivors face serious barriers to accessing legal aid in the family courts. The current legal aid means test takes the abuser's income into account when assessing a victim's eligibility, unless the survivor can prove economic abuse, which is extremely difficult, or prove that they no longer live with the abuser. Abusers typically control finances and can withhold documentation, disqualifying victims from receiving the support that they need. Will the Solicitor General consider the recommendation of the Bar Council and make an exemption for domestic abuse survivors from the means test?

The Solicitor General: I know the hon. Gentleman is a big champion on this issue. Victims of economic abuse face real challenges in getting justice, and he is right to draw attention to that issue. Legal aid is a matter for the Ministry of Justice, but I will commit to speaking with my ministerial colleagues on this issue and providing the hon. Gentleman with a full written response.

Violence against Women and Girls

4. **Peter Prinsley** (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates in cases of violence against women and girls. [906309]

5. **Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates in cases of violence against women and girls. [906310]

10. **Tristan Osborne** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates in cases of violence against women and girls. [906316]

The Solicitor General: Tackling violence against women and girls is a top priority for this Government and for me. With the Crown Prosecution Service, I am utterly determined to drive improvements in performance across the breadth of VAWG offences. On domestic abuse, the CPS launched its joint justice plan with policing in November 2024. Over the last year, that has led to a 10% increase in charge volumes and a 7% increase in conviction volumes. Before the end of the year, the CPS plans externally to launch its own VAWG strategy, which aims to drive similar improvements across other VAWG offences.

Peter Prinsley: In my constituency, I recently visited an inspirational charity called Restore, which provides vital refuge for women fleeing domestic abuse. When I spoke with the dedicated staff there, I was concerned to learn that victims of domestic abuse in rural areas such as parts of my constituency are only half as likely to report their abuse as others. What steps is the CPS taking to ensure that victims in rural communities such as mine are confident to come forward?

The Solicitor General: I thank Restore for its excellent work—the organisation has been diligently supporting victims of domestic abuse for decades now. Under the joint justice plan, CPS areas and police forces have worked together to tailor their response to domestic

abuse, addressing local priorities and community needs, including those in rural areas. In the new year, police and CPS will hold a joint knowledge-sharing event on domestic abuse in rural areas, to build improved understanding of the barriers these victims often face.

Joe Morris: In 2024-25, Northumberland domestic abuse services supported 555 adult survivors of domestic abuse and responded to thousands of domestic abuse incidents. Sadly, many of those incidents involved children. Will the Solicitor General meet me and Sharon Brown from NDAS—who is sat in the Public Gallery—to discuss steps for improving support for victims of domestic abuse in rural areas?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend's question provides another example of the enormously important work that organisations such as NDAS do to support survivors of domestic abuse. I welcome Sharon to the Gallery today, and pay tribute to her and her colleagues. I would be delighted to meet her and my hon. Friend to discuss what more can be done to support victims in rural areas, particularly with our CPS colleagues.

Tristan Osborne: Prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse dramatically fell under the last Government, which impacted constituents across all of our areas, including in Chatham and Aylesford. What steps are the Government taking to increase the level of prosecutions and convictions for this heinous crime?

The Solicitor General: For several years now, the CPS has maintained a high and steady charge rate of around 80%, and a conviction rate of 75%. This Government are taking radical action to ensure that more cases come into the system and progress through it. We have introduced Raneem's law, which embeds domestic abuse specialists in 999 control rooms, and have launched domestic abuse protection orders, which go further than any other order to protect victims.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Will the Solicitor General discuss with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Secretary how best the Metropolitan police may be encouraged to expedite their inquiry into the crimes of those who aided and abetted Mohamed Fayed, so that—for the sake of those who suffered violence and rape at his hands—they can be brought to book?

The Solicitor General: The right hon. Gentleman raises a really serious and important case; I am sure the thoughts of the House are with the victims. As he is aware, I cannot speak to cases in which there are live criminal investigations, but I am grateful to him for raising this extremely important issue, which I and other ministerial colleagues are following closely.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Prosecution rates in cases of violence against women and girls are harmed by the requirement that the police provide the CPS with redacted evidence under the general data protection regulation. Given the wider delays already affecting our justice system, does the Solicitor General agree that it would be prudent to remove the GDPR-related redaction

burden from the police, thereby improving the efficiency of the CPS's work and reducing the unnecessary workload on policing?

The Solicitor General: That is certainly something that I would be very happy to discuss with CPS colleagues and to provide a full response on.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): Today has seen the publication of the safeguarding review into the murder of my 10-year-old constituent Sara Sharif. The findings of that inquiry are what I feared—that the state, especially Surrey county council, could have protected her and saved her life, but did not. Will the Solicitor General please meet me to ensure we can urgently implement the 15 recommendations of that report in order to protect children and girls in future?

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Member for raising a—

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just say to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) that the question was being answered, and as a senior Member, he should know better than walking in at that point?

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Member for Woking (Mr Forster) for raising an extremely serious and tragic case. It is important that it has been raised in the House. I will certainly look at those recommendations closely and ensure that he gets a meeting with me or the relevant Minister.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Solicitor General.

Helen Grant (Maidstone and Malling) (Con): I also welcome the right hon. Lady to her place. She is the third Solicitor General I have sat opposite in the past 12 months, and I look forward to working with her constructively where we can and to having healthy debate in this Chamber in the weeks and months to come.

I associate myself with the right hon. Lady's remarks on the sad passing of Baroness Newlove. I had the honour of working with her when I was the Victims Minister. She was a great champion of victims and she will be sadly missed.

Violence against women and girls is a scourge. It wrecks families and ruins lives. One of the most sickening aspects of it is cruelty to and abuse of children. There is

currently no national mechanism to track down and monitor serious child cruelty offenders after service of their sentences. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Jake Richards), said this of the Sentencing Bill on Report:

“A problem in the system has been identified, and we are determined to fix it. It simply cannot be right that some horrific child abusers can have access to children—to live with children or work with children—at the end of their sentences without any system of monitoring or notification”.—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2025; Vol. 774, c. 409.]

The Minister went on to welcome the offer of cross-party talks and promised to work “at speed” to establish a child cruelty register. Can the Solicitor General please update the House on what concrete steps have been taken since then?

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Member for raising the extremely important issue of child abuse. I will work with the Minister to respond to her in full on the points that she raises today.

Helen Grant: The campaign to introduce a child cruelty register has been led tirelessly by Paula Hudgell, the adoptive mother of 11-year-old Tony Hudgell. Sadly, Paula has now been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Tony was just 41 days old when his birth parents abused him so badly that he had to have both his legs amputated. Tony will live with the consequences of those injuries for the rest of his life. Will the Solicitor General agree to work, and at speed, with her colleagues in the Ministry of Justice? They seem keen to support Paula's campaign, hopefully with an amendment to the Sentencing Bill in the House of Lords. We must take this opportunity to close this dangerous safeguarding gap so that all our children and families can be protected from repeat abusers.

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Member for raising the tragic case of Tony Hudgell. I know that his parents, along with the right hon. Member for Tonbridge (Tom Tugendhat), who is no longer in his place, have campaigned tirelessly for Tony and his family. I am very sorry to hear about Paula's diagnosis, and I am sure that the thoughts of the House are with her and the family. I will take this matter away and do everything I can, along with Home Office and Justice Ministers, and we will respond in full to the points raised by the hon. Lady.

Business of the House

10.38 am

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): The business for the week commencing 17 November will include:

MONDAY 17 NOVEMBER—Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill.

TUESDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill.

WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Border Security, Asylum And Immigration Bill, followed by Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Property (Digital Assets) Bill [*Lords*].

THURSDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Debate on a motion on the subject of international Men's day, followed by debate on a motion on an injury in service award. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 21 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 24 November includes:

MONDAY 24 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (day one).

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (day two).

WEDNESDAY 26 NOVEMBER—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver her Budget statement.

THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 1 December includes:

MONDAY 1 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

Jesse Norman: I am sure I speak for many Members when I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the whole of the Speaker's Office for the work you have put in to make this past week of remembrance so memorable. The gardens of remembrance, the projection of images from the second world war on to the Elizabeth Tower, the wreath laying in Westminster Hall and much else—all these things, I know, took a huge amount of organisation, co-ordination and hard work, so I thank you and your office. I draw colleagues' attention to the launch of the project to build the remembrance clock at the national arboretum, and hope that they will dig deep to support that.

In the spirit of exchanging news stories that have developed over the past two or three weeks, I will, if I may, set out a raft of intriguing items. Nine former

four-star generals have condemned the Government's treatment of veterans on Remembrance Day. One million more people than a year ago are now claiming universal credit without any requirement to look for a job. The Chancellor gave an unexpected early press conference—apparently to prepare people for major tax rises—and the Prime Minister acknowledged yesterday the rise in national insurance. Junior doctors have announced a five-day strike, starting tomorrow, in pursuit of a 26% pay rise, on top of the woefully inadequate—as they see it—29% received last year. No. 10 Downing Street has insisted that the Prime Minister has full confidence in Morgan McSweeney, and that he—or perhaps Mr McSweeney—will still be Prime Minister at the next election.

It has rightly been said that our country has moved from being post war to being pre-war. In recent weeks, we have seen a marked escalation of the conflict in Ukraine: Russian forces have made gains in and around the city of Pokrovsk, threatening to cut transport routes and displace thousands more civilians, and missile and drone attacks on energy and transport infrastructure have intensified, with serious consequences for Ukraine's ability to sustain its economy through the winter. These developments follow reports of a significant increase in Russian arms production and continued circumvention of sanctions through covert oil and gas shipments. At the same time, international aid flows have slowed, and Ukrainian forces are facing actual or potential shortages of money, ammunition or equipment.

All that, I suggest, underlines the need for Parliament to take stock. Three years into the conflict, the nature of the war is shifting, and now demands renewed strategic co-ordination among Ukraine's allies. In that context, I ask the Leader of the House to commit to keeping back 4 December for the Backbench debate on Ukraine requested by my brilliant hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) and agreed by the Backbench Business Committee.

By my calculation, we have not had a general debate on Ukraine on the Floor of the House since February this year, and not on a substantive motion since 2023. The debate would allow the House to review the current worrying state of military preparedness and humanitarian situation, the position on frozen Russian financial assets held in Europe, the status of occupied territories that Russia wrongly claims for itself, and the Government's approach to long-range defensive support and sanctions enforcement. Right hon. and hon. Members could examine the diplomatic context, test Government policy and cross-departmental co-ordination, and bring the diverse range of expertise and knowledge across the House to bear on a crucial issue facing the entire continent of Europe. Above all, it would allow this House of Commons, as an institution, to brief itself in full and demonstrate the strong sense of unity that exists in this country on the vital defence of our sovereign ally, Ukraine. The House has been steadfast in its support for Ukraine, and rightly so, but, as the conflict evolves, we must ensure our response evolves with it. It is possible that the Leader of the House's genius for prognostication and intelligence-gathering may have already caused him to form a supportive view of this request, but, if not, I ask very much that he have the Government make time on 4 December for that timely and important debate.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the House.

Sir Alan Campbell: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* Mr Speaker, sorry. It is very early in the day.

I thank the shadow Leader of the House for his remarks. I join him in thanking you, Mr Speaker, and indeed all House staff, for this week's work on remembrance events, which provide an opportunity for us, not just as a House but as a nation, to come together each year to pay collective tribute to those who have served and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. I also join the shadow Leader of the House in drawing the attention of Members to the remembrance clock at the National Memorial Arboretum, which will serve as a permanent memorial to MPs, peers, journalists and staff who died in war, conflict, and because of acts of terrorism. Mr Speaker, I know that you and the Lord Speaker have written to Members regarding this, but I join the shadow Leader of the House in suggesting that, where possible, colleagues may wish to contribute to that fund.

I also draw attention to the fact that the Government have today published their response to the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration, setting out plans to mark that period in our nation's history. My thoughts, and those of the Government, are with the many families who suffered the devastating loss of a loved one during that time. I know that there are members of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice in Parliament today, and we thank them for all they do to provide support to others in their grief. The commemorative programme will ensure that, as a country, we do not forget.

This month also marks a number of important awareness campaigns. November is Men's Mental Health Month, which raises awareness, tackles stigma surrounding men's mental health and encourages men to seek help and support when they need it. We also recognise Islamophobia Awareness Month. Islamophobia has no place in our society; the Government are clear that we must challenge and eradicate all forms of Islamophobia and ensure that everyone feels safe in their community.

I will come to the shadow Leader of the House's points in a moment, but I am sure the whole House will join me in welcoming the Transport Secretary's announcement yesterday about plans aimed at reducing long waiting lists for driving tests and preventing slots being sold on at inflated prices. That is good news as not only do many of our constituents take a keen interest in the issue, but many Members across the House have raised it during business questions and on other parliamentary occasions. It is evidence, if we needed it, that the Government are listening to those concerns and are taking action.

I will turn now to the shadow Leader of the House's remarks and, to some extent, put aside his knockabout—except to point out, of course, that it is true that more people are moving across to universal credit, because it was always planned that people would move across in the new system. There is no great surprise there.

On the more serious point that the right hon. Gentleman raises, we stand firm in our support for Ukraine and its sovereignty. I am talking not just about this Government but this House: it is important that we get an opportunity to discuss these matters. I will take seriously his reasonable request that we have a debate—certainly before the end of this year—because the Government do stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ukraine. We have a good record of bringing the matter back to the House, particularly

through statements, so that the House is updated on any developments, but I do want to give the House an opportunity to debate the matter more fully.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Two families in High Green in my constituency have now waited two years for a scheme of works to their social houses, which was originally estimated to take just 12 weeks. This is completely unacceptable. I visited them last week and saw that the work that has been completed is substandard, creating damp and mould issues and causing damage to property and personal possessions. This has left families with a horrific impact on their wellbeing and mental health. As the Renters' Rights Act 2025 has now become law, will the Leader of the House tell me how I can secure a meeting with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss how he can further empower Sheffield city council to hold contractors to account under the new decent homes standard in that Act, to enable the works to finally be completed to a high standard for my constituents in High Green?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is a doughty advocate for her constituents. This sounds like an untenable situation for some of her constituents. She is absolutely right to say that the Renters' Rights Act will transform the experience of private renting, and we have also brought Awaab's law into force in the social rented sector. I will ensure that she gets a meeting with a Minister, so that she can make her case directly and find out more about what the Government intend.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I join the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House in thanking you and all the staff for playing a role in organising the remembrance events of the past week?

I, too, would like to focus on Ukraine this week. Russia's war is rumbling on and we are about to enter a long and cold winter, in which it looks like temperatures will drop below minus 20°C. We hear that Vladimir Putin has a vicious plot to attack the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, threatening the heat supply to the very homes in which families are trying to survive. As Russia makes advances, it feels like Britain and its allies have reached a bit of a stalling point. We are standing around worrying whether it is legitimate to seize Russian assets, and we are worried about potential future legal claims by the Russian state. All the while, Putin is pouring petrol into his war machine. I feel that the time for deliberation is surely over. Several legal routes have been proposed, and it is now time to act.

In the meantime, one of the weapons that we have in our armoury is the sanctions regime against Russia. It is important not only to impose these sanctions, but to enforce them. It was quite shocking to learn this week that the Government were unable to explain why over £30 million-worth of Russian planes were imported into the UK. I note that the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation is much smaller than its equivalents in the US and the EU. In the debate that we may have about Ukraine before the end of the year, I wonder whether we could focus on the role of OFSI and determine

[Bobby Dean]

whether it is adequate, and whether it has the resources to properly deal with the scale and importance of the UK sanctions regime.

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is right: addressing Ukraine's financial needs is vital to ensuring that the Ukrainians can continue to defend themselves against Russian aggression. I can confirm that the UK is determined to make progress on this issue at pace, but I am sure he understands that it involves working with other partners in this regard. There is no intention not to move at pace, but other people are involved in this discussion as well. Regardless of whether Russia has a plot for a new stage in the campaign or not, we continue to bolster Ukraine's armed forces and to increase pressure on Russia to come to the negotiating table, because we all want to see an end to the conflict.

The hon. Gentleman mentions sanctions. We are pleased that the United States has joined the UK in sanctioning Lukoil and Rosneft, which is very important, but as he points out, it is important that we enforce those sanctions. He raises some interesting points about whether the regime is robust enough. If we are to have a debate before the end of the year, this is the very sort of thing that he might want to raise himself.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): Children and adults across Stourbridge and the wider Black Country are being prevented from accessing vital care and support because all new shared care agreements have been stopped since the start of September. The Black Country integrated care board has placed the blame on GP surgeries, but I have since discovered that this was at the instruction of the ICB. With some children out of school and some adults out of work without further support, does the Leader of the House agree that ICBs need to prioritise funding for these patients, not leave them waiting any longer?

Sir Alan Campbell: Yes, I do agree. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that everyone has access to the care and support they need, and we recognise that demand for such support has grown nationally, which is one of the reasons why we have invested over £1 billion in special educational needs and disabilities to create a system that supports every child. However, as the House will know, we intend to take this matter forward with a consultation and ultimately legislation. The ADHD taskforce published its final report last week, and I will ensure that the House is updated on the Government response.

Mr Speaker: I call the acting Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): The Chairman sends his apologies for his absence today. When we met on Tuesday, the Committee again had great difficulty in allocating time to the many applications that we are receiving. I make the usual plea to the Leader of the House for as much time as possible so that we can accommodate all the various applications. I welcome his acknowledgment of the need for an early debate on Ukraine, which came before the Committee on Tuesday via an application from my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin).

In addition to the debates that the Leader of the House has announced in the Chamber next week, in Westminster Hall there will be a debate on Tuesday 18 November on the 80th anniversary of UNESCO, and debates on Thursday 20 November on inequalities faced by unpaid carers and World COPD—chronic obstructive lung disease—Day. I urge Members who want debates to coincide with specific events to apply early, because we are now looking to allocate time for debates in February and March.

Turning to my own question to the Leader of the House, yesterday—I am sure along with many other Members—I attended the drop-in session organised by Samaritans and the Centre for Countering Digital Hate. I was shown the template letters produced by AI that, in effect, encourage particularly young and vulnerable people to consider suicide, which is an appalling state of affairs. I recognise that Ministers are looking at all aspects of the digital world and so on, but I am sure the whole House agrees that we must take urgent action to combat this. I hope the Leader of the House will arrange a statement by a Minister on how the Government intend approaching it.

Sir Alan Campbell: On the question of Backbench Business, the hon. Member will know that I have committed to making sure that the Committee has the time it needs. He will also know that this is a busy time of the year: there is plenty of legislation, not least the Bills coming back from the other place, and we are approaching Budget season. However, I take very seriously the points he makes because inevitably the issues that Members want to raise are serious matters.

On the hon. Member's second point, I thank him not just for raising that question, but for the tone in which he raised it. He has done a lot of work on these matters, which are incredibly serious because of their impact on our constituents. I, too, commend Samaritans, the Centre for Countering Digital Hate and all other organisations that support people on these issues. I will ensure that he gets a response from the relevant Minister on what we intend to do to combat this matter, and if it is appropriate, a statement to the House.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. To help the House, I am going to run business questions until 11.45 am, as we have a lot of business today. If we can speed up the questions and answers, I hope we will get nearly everybody in. I call Baggy Shanker to give the best example.

Baggy Shanker (Derby South) (Lab/Co-op): ASG's 100-strong Derby workforce show exactly why we are a proud city of makers, but the Jaguar Land Rover cyber-attack has left them on a cliff edge with no certainty of work. Does my right hon. Friend recognise the vital importance of companies such as ASG across the supply chain, and does he agree that we must do as much as we can to help prevent such cyber-attacks?

Sir Alan Campbell: Yes, I do recognise that. Cybersecurity is a key priority for the Government. We are working with the National Cyber Security Centre to provide businesses, including the companies my hon. Friend talks about, with the tools, advice and support they need to protect themselves against cyber-attacks.

The Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill was introduced to Parliament yesterday. It will ensure that the UK is better protected to face down cyber-criminals and state-backed actors.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): Will the Leader of the House encourage the Health Secretary to break off from his leadership bid to come to the House for a few minutes to explain what progress is being made on ensuring that Knutsford gets the new medical centre that health professionals, the public and I believe is essential?

Sir Alan Campbell: The Health Secretary is no stranger to coming to this House to update it on the excellent work that he and his Department are doing. I do not have knowledge of this specific case and I wonder whether it is one of those centres that was promised by the previous Government when the money did not exist, but I will draw it to the attention of the Health Secretary. Perhaps the right hon. Lady may wish to meet him to make the case herself.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the words from the Leader of the House about the covid memorial response. Last Friday in my constituency, I met some bereaved families, led ably by my constituent Lynn Jones, whose husband Gareth sadly passed away. We are working on a local covid memorial in Stoke-on-Trent. May I encourage the Leader of the House to hold a statement on today's announcement, so that this House can remember the names and the lives of those who are lost, and explore with the relevant Minister how the aspiration set out today can be translated into memorials up and down the country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I think we should go one stage further and have a debate, perhaps through a Backbench Business debate or an Adjournment debate, so that not only can a Minister go through what has been announced, but, because these issues affect every Member of this House, we are all able to raise relevant constituency cases as the House comes together to remember what were very, very dark days.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People, a charity based in my constituency with nationwide partners, has been active for over 90 years. It has gone into administration and is now on day three of a 28-day wind down, causing severe disruption to the 20,000 disabled people a year it supports. One family member told me that she has not slept properly since hearing that the charity will close. The organisation has treated 132 NHS patients in the past year, and there will be an overall loss of 48 NHS beds.¹ The NHS has agreed to buy the building, but it will not be using it immediately. Another offer from a separate charity would allow it to keep operating, but its hands are tied by the Pension Protection Fund. Does the Leader of the House agree that the Government must urgently set out plans to save this essential service for disabled people, rescue 250 jobs and meet urgently in the next week to discuss the situation?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will draw this issue to the attention of the relevant Health Minister to make sure the hon. Lady gets the response she needs.

Natalie Fleet (Bolsover) (Lab): Special educational needs families in Bolsover and across Derbyshire are let down by our dire education services that were ripped to ruin by the Tories and are now being failed by Reform. I met families earlier this year and heard heartbreaking stories of how they and their babies are being let down. It was horrendous. They are being ignored by the Reform council: letters are not being responded to and cases are not being progressed. Children are out of education as a result. Does the Leader of the House agree with me that Reform Derbyshire county council must improve its special educational needs services and deliver for children across Derbyshire?

Sir Alan Campbell: Yes, I do. I said in an earlier answer that the Government take SEN reform very seriously indeed, because the system is broken. However, it is even worse where local authorities have a responsibility to do better and they do not do it. Typically of Reform, it over-offers and underachieves. I hope it gets the powerful message that my hon. Friend has delivered today.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House and others for pressing the case for a Backbench Business debate on Ukraine. I also thank the Leader of the House for considering the matter favourably. May I just emphasise the importance of having a motion on the Order Paper for such a debate that raises particular issues such as the missing children, the atrocities, the need for long-range weaponry and the need for increased sanctions? The conflict is at a tipping point and a clear, united statement of solidarity with Ukraine would be an important message to send from this House to Ukraine, to our allies, and to our adversaries.

Sir Alan Campbell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way he raises this matter. I will give a commitment that if we are able to find time for this debate, I will speak to him and those on his Front Bench to ensure that if the House agrees to the motion in that debate, which I suspect it will, it will be one of unity across the House.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): Last week I had the privilege of visiting Hitchin boys' school to listen to pupils across the year groups debating how we could do more to protect them from online harm, and I think we could probably learn some things from their thoughtful, considerate and informed approach. The debate was informed by some deep and troubling testimony about the risks they have been exposed to online. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the pupils on having such a fantastic discussion on this important topic, and could we have a debate here about what more the Government can do to protect young people right across the country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating the pupils of Hitchin boys' school, who were discussing a topic of huge importance. The Online Safety Act 2023 provides stronger protection for children, and we have launched a study into the effects of smartphone and social media use on children. My hon. Friend may wish to seek a debate in order to make those points to the whole House.

1.[Official Report, 18 November 2025; Vol. 775, c. 652.] (Correction)

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): We are in a farming emergency with the family farm tax, the early cutting off of the sustainable farming incentive and the watering down of measures to prevent equipment theft from farms, yet this morning, Members across the House who wanted to question Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were unable to do so because the Government persist in keeping DEFRA questions at just 40 minutes. Will the Leader of the House look at extending DEFRA questions to a full hour so that rural communities are not left behind?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will look at the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, but as he knows, if one thing expands, something else is squeezed. I will look at that, but it might not be as easy as he suggests.

Carolyn Harris (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): Last week during International Trade Week, my dear and hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and I jointly hosted a regional export trade seminar for businesses from across south Wales. As proud trade envoys, we were delighted to work with the Department for Business and Trade to offer Welsh small and medium-sized enterprises the opportunity to learn more about export opportunities and the support available. Will the Leader of the House join us in thanking DBT colleagues, Ministers and the businesses that attended for their commitment to ensuring that the UK is front and centre of global trade markets?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank colleagues at the Department for Business and Trade for their excellent work and thank the businesses for taking part, because they are the key to growing our economy. I also place on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend and our other trade envoys for their excellent work.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): Sixteen years of Conservative mismanagement of Shropshire council combined with successive Governments' failures to understand the needs of rural local authorities have left Shropshire council with a dire financial emergency and in need of exceptional financial support. The situation is critical. Can the Leader of the House assist me in arranging a meeting with the relevant Secretary of State and MPs for Shropshire so that we can press the Secretary of State to ensure that Shropshire receives that support?

Sir Alan Campbell: Yes, I can.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the appalling environmental pollution incident at Camber Sands in East Sussex last week. A few days later, we also had huge sewage dumps in the seas around my constituency, leaving beaches in Ramsgate and Broadstairs effectively unusable. Not only do these incidents have appalling impacts on nature, but they affect people's confidence in using the sea for health, wellbeing and enjoyment all year round. Will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate in Government time on the economic impact of water quality—poor water quality in particular—on our coastal towns and seaside resorts?

Sir Alan Campbell: As a coastal MP, I absolutely share my hon. Friend's concern about the state of not just the seas, but our rivers and lakes, and the terrible

legacy that we inherited. We are taking action to clean our waterways up through the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025. My hon. Friend may wish to apply for a debate—perhaps Backbench Business or Adjournment—both to make those points and to allow colleagues to speak about their experiences.

Peter Fortune (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): Residents of Northpoint in Bromley have suffered eight years of disruption and uncertainty due to work to replace cladding on their building. There is a case of serious water ingress, and they have now been waiting four months for a response from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to see if any subsequent work can be funded by the aluminium composite material remediation fund. Can we have a debate on how we can protect leaseholders and ensure that they do not suffer disruption like my residents in Bromley?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will make sure that I draw that to the attention of MHCLG Ministers. If an answer is awaited, I will make sure that residents get the answer, and perhaps Ministers can explain to the hon. Member what further steps we intend to take.

Mrs Elsie Blundell (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): Women and girls living with endometriosis are waiting on average nine years for a full diagnosis. That is almost a decade of pain, uncertainty and endurance before they receive the targeted support that they need. Would the Leader of the House agree that the soon-to-be-renewed women's health strategy must get a grip of these appalling wait times and ensure that all women affected are heard and finally prioritised?

Sir Alan Campbell: I do agree. It is a debilitating and life-altering condition. As my hon. Friend said, our renewed women's health strategy will set out our longer-term vision. Members from across the House will have concerns about this issue, so my hon. Friend may want to seek a Backbench Business or Adjournment debate.

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): Ella's law—the Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill—will now not get its Second Reading on 21 November, despite wide cross-party support. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Government make time on Fridays or at other times for more of the most vital private Members' Bills, such as Ella's law, or could they adopt the measures into their own Bills—for example the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill?

Sir Alan Campbell: The House will know that we have had the allocation of 13 sitting Fridays, but if certain reasons were brought forward—if, for example, amendments might have been made to Bills in the Lords—the Government may have an open mind about what sitting Fridays might look like. I also think there is a debate to be had about how we deal with private Members' Bills, if I am honest. I cannot comment on whether the measures are appropriate to be incorporated into Government legislation, but the hon. Member may wish to draw that to the attention of the appropriate Department.

Michael Wheeler (Worsley and Eccles) (Lab): Many of my constituents use the Warburton toll bridge to get to work, visit family and go about their everyday lives.

However, residents in Irlam and Cadishead have been arbitrarily excluded from the local resident discount scheme, meaning that they have to pay the full price while many who live further from the bridge receive a 50% discount. To date, Peel Ports has not responded to inquiries I have made on constituents' behalf. Will the Leader of the House consider a debate in Government time on the need to ensure that where essential infrastructure is in private hands, appropriate oversight is in place and local needs are properly considered?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. I understand his constituents' frustration if they rely on the bridge in their daily lives. The Government believe that local infrastructure should work for the community that it serves, and I will ensure that the relevant Minister hears about this issue.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): The Meriden gap is a vital route for migrating wildlife, and it is under huge threat from the Government's planning agenda and the dubiously vague definition of grey belt. My constituents in villages such as Balsall Common and Berkswell have already made huge sacrifices for projects like HS2. Now villages such as Hockley Heath, Dorridge, Knowle, Marston Green and Meriden are all under significant threat. Will the Leader of the House please write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and try to figure out how we can protect vital routes like the Meriden gap and while not increasing the housing burden when my constituents have already made significant sacrifices?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will draw that to the attention of the Secretary of State, but as the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a balance, which the Government want to achieve, between protecting nature and making sure that we have the houses this country needs.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): During Remembrance Week we rightly honour the service and sacrifice of our armed forces and their families. Children from armed forces families often face unique challenges in education and mobility, yet data on their outcomes and experiences remains limited. There is a need for better recognition of service children in education policy, for improved national data collection and for sustained funding for the professionals supporting them. Will the Leader of the House allocate time for a debate on ensuring that service children receive whole-person, whole-journey support and evidence-based investment to help them thrive?

Sir Alan Campbell: Children of armed forces families do face unique challenges. The Government are aware of this and recognise that we can do better by them than has been done in the past. This would be a good subject for a debate so that Members across the House can share experiences and Ministers can learn more about the way forward.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): In June, I met the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice (Emma Hardy), to press the Government to adopt the measures in my Chalk Streams (Sewerage Investment) Bill. I was delighted by her

commitments, namely that she would investigate whether Ministers already had the powers to instruct water companies to prioritise pipe upgrades in chalk streams and, in any event, would write to those water companies and ask them to do so. Will the Leader of the House please ask the Minister to produce a written statement to update the House on that work?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will ensure that the hon. Lady gets the update that she seeks.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When the last Government allowed the sale of Royal Mail to billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's company, they maintained a golden share, which I now ask Government to use. Services are less frequent, outsourced workers are handling parcels and postal workers feel devalued, with their traditional Christmas stamps downgraded to second class. Will the Leader of the House ask the Business Secretary to make a statement on Royal Mail, a service that should be renationalised, and ensure that our postal workers get their first-class stamps because they are simply first class?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the work of our postal workers and I join her in paying tribute to the dedication that they show particularly at this time of the year, but also throughout the year. I understand the disappointment that workers will feel at that decision and I will ensure that Ministers hear her concerns.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Northern Ireland Troubles Bill is in the business statement. Does the Leader of the House accept that that will cause concern for many members of the armed forces and the veterans community, who are worried that in years to come they may be judged by the standards of the day rather than the standards that applied when they were engaged in doing the state's business? Does he further recognise that there is good evidence now that people are leaving the armed forces, and certain parts of the armed forces in particular, because of those concerns? Will he also ensure that adequate time is provided on Second Reading and in Committee to assure the House that steps are being taken to remove that threat to national security?

Sir Alan Campbell: We are acutely aware of the concerns that the right hon. Gentleman raises. That is why we are bringing forward a Bill to replace legislation that was either illegal or unfit for purpose, or both. May I say that my hon. Friend, the former Veterans Minister who is now the Armed Forces Minister has done an excellent job of raising those matters at the heart of Government and seeking to reassure colleagues on them? As the right hon. Gentleman points out, we are bringing forward the legislation and we will ensure that there is adequate time so those matters can be debated properly.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): It is the time of year when people are saving for Christmas, which is a reminder that, years ago, thousands of savers lost tens of millions of pounds when the Christmas savings scheme Farepak collapsed, highlighting a big gap in consumer protection. May we have an opportunity in this House to highlight how finally, under this Government,

[*Jessica Morden*]

new regulations will come in from January 2026 due in no small part to my constituent, the former Farepak agent Deb Harvey, working with the former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders)? They have been campaigning for years. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking them for helping to ensure that something like that does not happen again?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am pleased to hear about the successful campaigning by my hon. Friend's constituent and to thank her for drawing the attention of successive Governments to these issues. I want to repeat what she has said: well done, Deb Harvey.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): May I thank the Leader of the House for what he said about reforms to the driving test booking system? I add to what my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) said about DEFRA questions. I wanted to raise the case of Susan Robinson and Maria La Femina, who asked me about sludge use in agriculture and what had happened with the regulations, but for the second or third DEFRA questions, I was not able to get in. It really would be worth considering whether we can extend DEFRA questions to the full hour, so that all colleagues would have the opportunity to keep trying to catch Mr Speaker's eye.

Mr Speaker: I think it is important, and it might also help if Front-Bench Members asked quicker questions and gave quicker answers—not on this one, though.

Sir Alan Campbell: I have nothing to add to what I said earlier about the timing and length of questions, but the right hon. Gentleman has raised that concern. If he gives me further details, I will draw the matter to the attention of Ministers now, rather than wait for change.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): I am pleased that so many nominations are rolling in for my fifth annual Luton South and South Bedfordshire small business awards. There are two weeks to go—keep nominating. Many of our small businesses are in the retail sector, and retail businesses make up 4.5% of our economy, but too many retail workers face terrible threats and abuse in the workplace. Will the Leader of the House join me in supporting the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers' Respect for Shop Workers Week this week and its "Freedom from Fear" campaign to ensure that all retail workers feel safe at work?

Sir Alan Campbell: The Government are committed to supporting small businesses—they are the backbone of our local communities. At the end of this month, we will mark Small Business Saturday, which gives us a further opportunity to celebrate the small businesses in our communities. I join my hon. Friend in supporting and praising USDAW's powerful campaign over a long period of time, because it is vital that hard-working retail staff are treated with respect. That is one of the reasons why we are taking action through our Crime and Policing Bill to safeguard staff from assault.

Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) (Reform): Given that the town of Runcorn in my constituency is the 16th most deprived town in the country, does the Leader of the House not agree that investing in education and young people's futures is key to changing that statistic? Therefore, may we have a debate in Government time on new higher education facilities in areas like mine?

Sir Alan Campbell: Improving educational opportunity, including through further education, is absolutely at the heart of what the Government are about in every constituency, not just the hon. Member's. She might want not just to raise this issue in Education questions, but to call for a debate of her own so that she can further the case.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Bassetlaw's Member of the Youth Parliament Cameron Holt had one ambition, and that was for financial literacy to be included in the national curriculum. He has been formidable in lobbying the Government and travelling up and down the country to speak in schools and on regional and national TV. The announcement that the national curriculum review will have a new requirement for financial education is welcome. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Cameron for his persistence and hard work?

Sir Alan Campbell: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Cameron on his hard work—he sounds like a remarkable young man. He is absolutely right to put the effort in. These are crucial skills to master, and we want to reform the curriculum to improve financial literacy, starting from an early age, to help children and young people prepare for the modern world.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I wonder if the Leader of the House could help me. We have heard of the concerns about special education needs from Members across the House. My constituency has them, too—the issue fills my inbox. He mentioned that there will be a consultation and a White Paper; the problem is that there is anxiety because they have been delayed. Will he write to the Department to ask for a timetable to be set out, because in my constituency we are seeing an increase in education, health and care plans owing to people's concern that they may go. There is real anxiety at the moment, and I urge him to help.

Sir Alan Campbell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the concern that parents in particular will have, but I gently point out that his Government had 14 years to put this right. Therefore, when this Government are taking the issue head-on, which we are, it does take a little bit of time to get it right. We are absolutely conscious of the need for every child to get the support they need as soon as possible, and we are working on a timetable and on what that means.

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): On the matter of remembrance, my constituent Frank Turvey's brother was Lance Corporal Brian Turvey, nicknamed "Topsy". He was just 20 years of age when he was killed in a terrorist attack in Famagusta on 4 May 1958 while on military police duties in Cyprus, just one day before he was due to return to the UK on leave. Lance Corporal Cameron also lost his life in the same ambush. Frank remembers his mum making a

cake to celebrate his brother's return when the officer turned up at their family home to inform them of the tragic news. Will the Leader of the House join me in remembering Lance Corporal Brian Turvey and Lance Corporal Cameron and their ultimate sacrifice for this country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for raising this matter and for remembering Lance Corporal Turvey and Lance Corporal Cameron and, indeed, all those young men and women who have lost their lives defending our country. Remembrance Day is, of course, an opportunity to remember, but for the families concerned, every day will be a day to remember. On how we can commemorate that going forward, I hope Defence Ministers will listen to what he says about what further measures we can take to remember such sacrifice.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I declare an interest: an employee of mine works for the company that I am about to mention, although they have not been affected by the action taken.

That company is video game publisher Rockstar Games, which has fired at least 30 employees across its UK studios, including Rockstar North in Edinburgh. Several of my constituents have been directly affected, and some came to express their concerns to me last week. They claim that they have been sacked because they were trying to unionise and discuss working conditions in private. Rockstar accused them of distributing confidential information and sacked them for gross misconduct. I have written to Rockstar to ask for information on this matter, but I wonder whether I might have a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss what steps can be taken to support the workforce, and to ask what action the Government are taking—

Mr Speaker: Order. Please. Does the hon. Member want to prevent other Members from getting in, because that is what she is doing? These questions finish at 11.45 am. I think the Leader of the House must have got a grip of the question.

Sir Alan Campbell: The sector that the hon. Lady talks about is important to the growth of the economy, but so too are rights at work. Successful companies are those that give decent rights and conditions to the people they employ. I will raise this matter with Ministers and see what action, if any, can be taken to resolve it.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): In the summer, I led a Backbench Business debate to mark the fifth anniversary of the covid pandemic. One of our asks was for a database that properly records all the covid memorials around the country. I am delighted that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has launched today an online interactive map that does exactly that. I join the Leader of the House in congratulating Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK, which has done so much to keep victims' memories alive. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the data released today is circulated to all hon. Members so that it can be promoted in our constituencies and all our local memorials can be properly recorded?

Sir Alan Campbell: I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Since coming to this place, I have struggled to find out how much money the UK Government are putting into the A75 road, which runs right through my constituency. I was astonished to find that a Labour candidate had said on social media that the figure was £8.5 million. I asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether that figure was correct—it was not. I was also told on social media that Anas Sarwar, the leader of the Labour party in Scotland, was responsible for that figure. Can the Leader of the House help me get to the bottom of this constitutional crisis, in which someone in another Parliament pulls the strings in this one?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am not sure that it is a constitutional crisis, but I will help the hon. Gentleman to get to the bottom of how much is being committed. I am pretty sure that it is a lot more than the previous Government committed.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): This week, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology made the very welcome announcement that animal testing in science is set to be phased out faster, delivering on the Government's manifesto pledge to strengthen animal welfare. Does the Leader of the House agree with me that, as well as delivering on that pledge, we must now deliver on the related manifesto commitment to end the foxhunting smokescreen and ban trail hunting as soon as possible? To that end, will he help me to secure a meeting with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss the timetable?

Sir Alan Campbell: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the Government's announcement of our ambitious programme for animal welfare—the most ambitious in a generation. I assure him that we remain committed to banning trail hunting; we will consult on how to deliver the ban in the new year. I will ensure that he gets a meeting with Ministers.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): More than 50 countries have endorsed the tropical forests scheme launched at COP30 in Brazil. It is one of the most significant global initiatives to protect tropical forests. The UK's decision not to contribute is a shocking failure in emissions reduction, international nature finance and our relationships with South America. Might we have a debate about the important need for the Government to revisit and reverse that decision before the end of COP30?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman can seek either an Adjournment debate—that is probably the best route—or a Backbench Business debate to raise those matters and have a Minister set out why that decision was made, if what he says is accurate.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): Today marks the start of Transgender Awareness Week. I express my solidarity with and respect for the trans community in Aylesbury. When I met a local LGBTQ+ group recently, we discussed the urgent need to end the harmful practice

[*Laura Kyrke-Smith*]

of conversion therapy. Labour committed to doing so in our manifesto, so will the Leader of the House update me on when that matter will be given parliamentary time?

Sir Alan Campbell: We are committed to bringing forward legislation to ban these abusive practices. It was, as my hon. Friend says, and is a key manifesto commitment. I cannot give her an exact time, but when the legislation does come forward, there will be plenty of time for debate on the matters that she raises.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): My constituents continue to suffer from the dither, delay and ineptitude of Transport for London and the Mayor, as the rebuilding of the Gallows Corner junction, which was originally meant to be completed in September, is now delayed to the spring. This is causing chaos in Essex and on the eastern side of London. Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Transport to take over this project, so that everyone can get on with their life and travel freely through this junction?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will raise the issue with the Transport Secretary, to see how it can be resolved.

Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab): My constituent Michelle would like to move closer to her children, but as a leaseholder, she is trapped in her property. There is only a short term remaining on her lease, and she has tried to extend it, but the freeholder is demanding a sum that is disproportionate to the property value. On top of that, she would have to cover the freeholder's administrative fees, making the cost entirely unaffordable. For constituents like Michelle, who are essentially subject to the whim of the freeholder, leasehold reform could not be more urgent. Can the Leader of the House ask the relevant Minister to provide an update on the Government's plans to fix the broken freehold system?

Sir Alan Campbell: We are committed to making commonhold the default tenure for flats, and bringing the feudal leaseholder system to an end. I will ensure that the House is kept updated as we publish the consultation on banning leasehold for new flats and the draft commonhold and leasehold reform Bill later this year.

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): Coeliac disease impacts one in 100 people, yet ability to access gluten-free food on prescription is a postcode lottery. For Ted and his mother, who live in Redbourn, that means they miss out, and they have seen costs go up by 40%. Can we have time to talk about the postcode lottery for prescriptions, including for those with coeliac disease?

Sir Alan Campbell: I advise the hon. Lady to seek an Adjournment or a Backbench Business debate on that. As a gluten-free person, I assure her that I appreciate the points that she raises.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): Like many MPs across the House, I am sure, I have been inundated with correspondence from concerned constituents on the issue of fireworks, be it about their use in antisocial

behaviour, the impact on household pets, or the severe distress that they can cause to the vulnerable, including veterans. The status quo is clearly not acceptable. While I support organised firework events, does the Leader of the House agree that it is time to review all the legislation in this area, and will he grant a debate in Government time on this issue?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am sure every MP has had correspondence on this, particularly in recent weeks—it is a real issue at this time of year. It is important, however, that the debate and any measures brought forward on fireworks are proportionate. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a good time for a debate, and he might wish to seek either a Backbench Business or an Adjournment debate on the subject, so that others can share their experience.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): My constituent Evelyn Armstrong, aged 104, has recently been awarded France's highest military honour, the Légion d'honneur, for the vital role she played as a plotter and flight controller in the second world war, when she served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. She is truly an amazing woman. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to Evelyn, and can we have a debate on honouring the service of our wartime heroes?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Evelyn Armstrong, who has been awarded the Légion d'honneur. I also want to acknowledge the way in which the French Government recognise the role of servicemen and women from other countries who helped to liberate France during the second world war. We had an opportunity to discuss that earlier this week, but I am sure there will be further opportunities to talk about that remarkable generation in the months to come.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): I was recently contacted by a constituent about Greater Manchester integrated care partnership funding an autism assessment for his son. After waiting eight months, my constituent was informed that his chosen provider's funding had been cut by the ICP. With his GP's help, he was able to transfer to a different provider, whose funding has also been cut, and his application is now on hold, with no timetable for a resolution. Given the current NHS waiting times for autism assessment, can we have a debate in Government time on the steps being taken to ensure that children get the reviews they need?

Sir Alan Campbell: As I said earlier, we are acutely aware of this issue, which is why we are bringing forward proposals to fundamentally alter the special educational needs and disabilities system, but I will raise my hon. Friend's concerns with Ministers to see what further action can be taken to assist his constituent.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Will the Leader of the House consider setting aside Government time for a debate on regenerating coastal communities, so that we can properly consider issues facing towns like Sandown on the Isle of Wight, including transport connectivity, pressure on tourism, derelict buildings and declining high streets?

Sir Alan Campbell: As a coastal MP, I absolutely endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said, and if people want to see fantastic regeneration in action, they should come to Whitley Bay. That was the result of the previous Labour Government's funding and commitment, but the hon. Gentleman's Government continued it, and it is important that this Government continue it too, as we intend to. This is a really good topic. There are lots of coastal MPs in this place, and I am sure that a debate on the issue, if he sought one from the Backbench Business Committee, would be timely.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): I was pleased to attend the opening of new mental health facilities at Kingsway hospital in Derby. It marks a huge step forward in the care available for local people, and gives patients greater dignity, privacy, and the support of the surroundings that they need on their journey to recovery. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating all those involved in delivering that fantastic project, and will he find time for a debate on how we can continue to improve mental health provision across the country, particularly for adults requiring acute care?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this matter, which is of absolute importance to the Government in the work that they are doing. I join her in congratulating everyone involved in the project that she mentions, as well as those doing fantastic work in quite difficult circumstances across our country. I am sure that in future there will be a debate in which she can discuss the matter further.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Residents in Chichester living on managed estates have written to me about the exploitative practices of estate management companies, and the service charges that they are charged for work that is funded but never delivered. Fees more than double year on year, and residents have no power to challenge those companies. Will the Leader of the House urgently make time for a debate on the subject, so that we can finally improve outcomes for those residents in Chichester and across the country?

Sir Alan Campbell: As the hon. Lady says, this is an issue not just in Chichester, but across the country. She will know that we are looking at a range of measures—on planning, leasehold reform and everything else—to ensure that we do not get the terrible cases that we did in the past of people who move to estates being held to ransom.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I am sure that Members from across the House will want to thank volunteers and members of the Royal British Legion for their exemplary work in recent weeks. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Keith Richardson, and members of the Carlisle and Stanwix branch of the Royal British Legion, for organising an inspiring number of events in my Carlisle constituency, including, frankly, with respect to the Royal Albert Hall, the best festival of remembrance?

Sir Alan Campbell: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in thanking Keith Richardson and everyone involved in the Royal British Legion in her proud and beautiful city. The work that they do is important for the local community, and it is replicated by so many people across this country.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): The decision by Liberal Democrats on Somerset council to cancel the Cross Rifles roundabout upgrade in Bridgwater has left residents facing severe congestion. Combined with a new one-way system on Salmon Parade and East Quay, it has left Bridgwater gridlocked, and my constituents now face longer and more costly journeys. One resident, Sadie, told me that because of the one-way system, her weekly taxi fare to the supermarket has risen from £7 to £20. May we have a debate on how we can hold councils to account when they cancel Government-funded infrastructure projects without offering an alternative for local people?

Sir Alan Campbell: Local infrastructure is so important, particularly to rural communities. I will draw this case to the attention of the Department for Transport, but in the business I have announced, and in proceedings on the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, there might be an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to raise the issue of how local authorities can be held to account for the decisions they make.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): Hundreds of my West Dunbartonshire constituents, and thousands more across the country, were served notice of the termination of their family protection funeral plan by CMutual and Maiden Life UK. All are members of credit unions, and they are elderly and vulnerable. They have paid in thousands of pounds over the years, but will be left with absolutely nothing on 30 November. Will the Leader of the House agree to an urgent debate on the subject in Government time, and ask the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to conduct an urgent investigation?

Sir Alan Campbell: This is an important issue and a concerning situation, and I will draw it to the attention of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. My hon. Friend may get an opportunity to raise the issue during the Budget debate, for which there will be a lot of time.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): Some of my constituents have had valuable property stolen from their homes during viewings, and have come to discover that the so-called potential buyers or tenants were not who they purported to be. Estate agents usually check the financial readiness and capacity of potential buyers and tenants, but can we have a debate on the need for estate agents to verify the names and addresses of the people they introduce to new properties, regardless of whether they will be accompanied to a viewing by the agent, so we can stop this brass-necked daylight robbery?

Sir Alan Campbell: The Government are looking at the whole subject of buying and selling houses, and this issue may be an interesting part of that. The hon. Lady may wish to write to the Minister about it.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): Minky Homecare's ironing board factory in Shawclough, in Rochdale, is the only one of its kind in the whole country. It provides high-quality British-made products and lots of vital local jobs. Does the Leader of the House agree with me that making, selling and buying British products is this Government's priority, as we support our manufacturers across the country?

Sir Alan Campbell: British businesses, like Minky Homecare, are vital to boosting the economy and creating jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency—his home town—and he understands that perfectly. The Government are committed to supporting small businesses, wherever they are, in achieving their potential, and to unlocking investment and driving growth.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Earlier this week, there was a large accidental industrial fire on Pitt Street, in Keighley in my constituency. Nine fire crews attended, some coming from as far away as Mirfield in West Yorkshire. Unfortunately, one person was taken to hospital, and there was a huge amount of damage done to local buildings. My thoughts go out to all those affected by the fire, and I want to personally thank the emergency services for their work, and for acting so professionally. Could we have a debate in Government time about recognising our emergency services, and about what more support the Government can give to businesses that are impacted by such devastating fires?

Sir Alan Campbell: I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to our emergency services, and we send our sympathies to those affected. If he seeks a Backbench Business debate or an Adjournment debate on the subject, he will be able to raise those points himself, but I gently point out that for the past 14 years, many services, particularly fire services, have been starved of the funding that they need, so he needs to understand that this is not a recent development.

Elaine Stewart (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Children in Need has been supporting disadvantaged young people for decades. This support is made possible by hard-working fundraisers up and down the country. Tomorrow night, 17-year-old Eloise from my constituency of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock, one of East Ayrshire's young carers, is throwing herself into a musical theatre challenge on skates, with the cast of "Starlight Express". She is a brilliant example of community spirit. Will the Leader of the House join me in recognising the incredible contribution of East Ayrshire's young carers, who balance caring responsibilities with school and everyday life?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am pleased to recognise the incredible contribution of East Ayrshire's young carers, and young carers across the country, whose vital contribution sometimes goes unseen. I wish Eloise skating success with her musical theatre challenge.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Many of my constituents will be disappointed that small modular reactors will be going to Wylfa, not Oldbury, and disappointed too by the Government's shambolic handling of the announcement. The news was leaked on Tuesday. The promised calls to me—first from the Minister, then from No. 10—failed to materialise yesterday, and the announcement was in the media this morning. There was no opportunity for this House to question Ministers. My constituents deserve to know more about the future of Oldbury, so will the Leader of the House allow a debate in Government time on this process, in which a degree of contempt has been shown to my constituents?

Sir Alan Campbell: If the hon. Lady writes to me, I will look into what has happened in this situation and

get an explanation. As she points out, her constituents have a right to know what will happen, and in a timely and organised fashion.

Martin Rhodes (Glasgow North) (Lab): I was recently asked to visit a shop in my constituency that has suffered over 100 reported robberies since opening last November. These incidents not only involve theft, but threats and attacks on staff. This situation is unfolding against the backdrop of a significant reduction in police presence. The Glasgow division of Police Scotland has lost 218 local officers since 2017. Will the Leader of the House allocate time for a debate on the importance of policing in supporting and protecting local businesses?

Sir Alan Campbell: The protecting of local businesses by the police is very important, not just in Scotland but everywhere else. Policing is a matter for the Scottish Government, but what my hon. Friend describes sounds like an untenable situation, particularly for the business to which he referred. Scotland has had the biggest funding settlement for a very long time, so I hope the Scottish Government have heard his words.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): Hon. Members who watched "Newsnight" last night will doubtless have been moved by Sir Michael Palin's interview about his wife Helen's final days and passing in a hospice. The package reveals what is known to many Members: the hospice crisis of funding, cuts and beds being closed. In the light of that, will the Leader of the House make time for Members to debate the crisis in our hospices, including the urgent need to reverse the Government's increases in national insurance contributions and to ensure that hospices are finally fairly funded?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Lady will know that the changes in the Budget last year were to find the money to support public services, so these are not easy decisions by any means. I know that her concern about hospices and the fantastic work they do in our local communities is felt across the House. She may wish to seek a debate on this issue, because the Government will at that point be able to remind the House that we have in fact put in more resources; £100 million has gone into hospices in the last year.

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): Ahead of the Budget, will the Leader of the House allow a debate during Government time to discuss the potential economic benefits of releasing the British Coal staff superannuation scheme investment reserve in order to increase the pensions of members of the BCSSS?

Sir Alan Campbell: As the House will know, my hon. Friend has been a formidable champion for mineworkers in his constituency and their families, and I pay tribute to him for that. The Government continue to meet with BCSSS trustees, and I will certainly draw his question to the attention of Ministers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am deeply troubled by increasing reports of the Taliban's crackdown on women's education: more than 2.2 million Afghan girls have been banned from attending school beyond primary education. Will the Leader of the House urge the Foreign Secretary to outline what concrete actions the Government

will take to ensure the reversal of the Taliban's ban, so that Afghan girls can access their fundamental right to education?

Sir Alan Campbell: We absolutely condemn the appalling erosion of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. We have provided £151 million in aid programmes to provide lifesaving support for the most vulnerable people in the country, particularly for women and girls. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a reply from the Foreign Secretary to the very important points that he raises with his usual diligence and excellent tone.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. For those Members who did not get in, we will keep the list for next week.

Police Reform

11.47 am

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on police reform.

Let me begin by expressing my sadness at the passing of Baroness Newlove, the Victims' Commissioner. She was a champion for victims and made a huge difference, holding Government and agencies to account. I extend my sympathies to her family and friends, and I know that she will be a huge loss to the other place.

Last year, the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley (Yvette Cooper), informed the House of her intention to bring forward a White Paper on police reform. The White Paper will outline a programme of wide-ranging reforms that will drive quality, consistency and efficiency in policing to ensure that it is set up to deliver for the public. Ahead of publication, we are today announcing the first of those reforms.

In order for any institution or organisation to perform to the highest standards, it must be underpinned by strong, effective governance. That is all the more critical when the service in question is integral to the safe functioning of our society, as policing undoubtedly is. Police and crime commissioners have been in place since November 2012. The model was created to increase accountability and build a greater connection between policing and local communities by having a single public official, directly elected by the public, responsible for holding their chief constable to account, setting the local police budget and agreeing strategic priorities for their force through their local police and crime plan.

However, while the role of PCCs has evolved over time to include responsibility for commissioning services for victims, driving local partnerships and—in some areas—responsibility for fire governance, the model has failed to live up to expectations. It has not delivered what it was set up to achieve. Public understanding of, and engagement with, our police and crime commissioners remains low despite efforts to raise their profile; less than a quarter of voters turned out to vote for them in the 2024 elections, and two in five people are unaware that PCCs even exist. Home Office research conducted during the PCC review in 2020 found that 68% of the public in mayoral areas claimed that they could name their mayor, compared with only 16% of people in PCC areas claiming that they could name their PCC.

On an individual level, PCCs up and down the country have sought to provide strong oversight and drive crime prevention activity locally. I place on record my thanks to the individuals and staff in all the offices of police and crime commissioners and at the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners who have done, and will continue to do, their best to improve policing for their local communities. However, the reality is that the PCC model has weakened local police accountability and has had perverse impacts on the recruitment of chief constables. It has failed to inspire confidence in local people, in stark contrast to the mayoral model, which clearly has ultimately been more successful. The Theresa May model has not worked.

The Government announced in our English devolution White Paper that we will transfer policing functions to elected mayors in England by default wherever geographies

[Sarah Jones]

allow. Five mayors now hold policing functions, in Greater Manchester, Greater London and across Yorkshire. In those areas, we have seen the benefits of the mayoral model, including greater collaboration, visible leadership and local innovation. We are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to create as many strategic authority mayors with policing functions as possible in this Parliament. However, due to the nature of how public services are organised across different areas, the process of establishing mayors across England is a complex one.

I can therefore announce today that we will abolish police and crime commissioners at the end of their current term in 2028 and transfer functions to mayors wherever possible. In areas where plans do not yet allow for a transfer of policing to a mayor this Parliament, we will establish new policing and crime boards to bring council leaders together to oversee the police force in their area until such time as mayors are in place in England. Those boards will replicate the benefits of a mayoralty before the formal transfer can be realised, with in-built, local collaboration, public accountability and a greater ability to join up budgets and local services. They will comprise local authority upper-tier leaders, co-opted members with appropriate skills and experience, and—if they are in the force area—mayors.

Preventing crime is everyone's business, and giving local leaders these responsibilities will help create thriving town centres, help businesses to succeed and help people to walk without fear in their communities. We are absolutely clear that these boards will not be a return to the bureaucratic and invisible committee-based oversight of policing that existed before the establishment of PCCs. We will ensure that council leaders are empowered to exercise police governance functions. Boards will be supported by a policing and crime lead, akin to a deputy mayor for policing and crime, to carry out day-to-day activities on their behalf. This will mean that every area will have a visible, nominated lead who will be dedicated to the oversight of policing in their area.

Over the coming months, we will work with local government and policing to design new structures that will provide effective oversight of policing. As part of these reforms, we will also work with those in local government and policing to drive down the support costs of policing governance. We will no longer run separate policing elections, and we will also abolish police and crime panels, the current structure that performs scrutiny functions for PCCs. We estimate that at least £100 million will be saved this Parliament by moving to these new arrangements. Once delivered, these changes are expected to achieve savings to the Home Office of around £20 million a year, enough to fund around 320 extra police constables. Further detail will be set out in the forthcoming White Paper, and we will bring forward the necessary legislation as part of our broader police reform proposals as soon as parliamentary time allows.

There are no plans to create mayors in Wales. We wish to harmonise arrangements across England and Wales as far as possible, and we will therefore work with the Welsh Government to ensure new arrangements to replace PCCs provide strong and effective police governance for Wales, recognising the unique nature of Welsh

arrangements. I also clarify that these reforms will not affect governance arrangements for the City of London police, which is governed by the City corporation.

Before I conclude, I stress that the decision we are announcing today is based on the shortcomings of the PCC model, not the PCCs themselves. PCCs have done and continue to do important work, and I will engage constructively with all of them until the end of their terms. I specifically thank the chairs of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners past and present for their endeavours: Nick Alston, the late Sir Tony Lloyd, Mark Burns-Williamson, Katy Bourne, Paddy Tipping, Marc Jones, Donna Jones, and the current chair Emily Spurrell. We recognise that this is a significant change, especially for the policing and local government sectors, but it is necessary. As a Government, we have a responsibility to do what is right for our communities. If there are steps we can take to improve outcomes for law-abiding citizens, we must act, because in the end, whatever police reform measures we pursue, our primary motivation is, and will always be, to keep the public safe. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

11.55 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. The Minister mentioned at the beginning the Government's plans to bring forward a police reform White Paper. That was announced, from memory, about a year ago, but there has not been a single sniff of that White Paper. Can she tell us when we can expect it and why the Government are so bereft of ideas that they have taken a year or more to publish it?

Today's statement about police and crime commissioners represents tinkering around the edges from a Government who are failing on crime and policing. They are simply rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. This Government are failing. Police numbers are falling. They fell by 1,300 during Labour's first year in office on a like-for-like, March-to-March comparison. Police numbers are not only continuing to fall, but will drop even more this year. Crime under this Government is surging: shoplifting is up by 13% in this Government's first year to record levels, leaving shopkeepers in difficulty, and we have seen theft from the person going up by 5% and sexual offences going up by 9%.

If it were not enough to see all those crime types surging under this Labour Government, senior police officers are warning that they face a funding crisis. Indeed, the chief constables of our four largest forces—Merseyside, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and the Metropolitan police—all said publicly just a few months ago that they face a funding crisis under this Labour Government.

It is clear that this Government are failing on police and crime, with falling police numbers, increasing crime and a funding crisis, yet the Policing Minister comes to us today with some minor tinkering around the edges. The Government say that they want to transfer PCC powers to mayors where they exist and where the territories are coterminous. Broadly speaking, that is the approach the previous Government took. In fact, I recall transferring one of the Yorkshire forces, I think, into the mayoral model a year or so ago. She asserts that the mayoral

model is superior to regular police and crime commissioners, and I wonder what evidence she can produce to support that, because the biggest police and crime commissioner in the country is the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who is also the worst PCC in the country. Knife crime is up 86% under Sadiq Khan, and the Met has the lowest clear-up rate of any force in the country at a lamentable 4.7%. He has closed down half the front counters in London, and police numbers are plummeting. How can the Minister make such an assertion?

For areas outside mayoralities, the Minister proposes essentially to abolish PCCs and replace them with some kind of committee comprised of local councillors. Will those have the same powers as police and crime commissioners? It is implied that they will, and if so, it will not save any money, other than from the election and the police and crime panel, which are very small costs. As far as I can see, this proposal will not save any money, but will remove a directly elected public official—the police and crime commissioner—who is accountable to the public and would certainly be more visible than some faceless committee of local bureaucrats. That is a retrograde step.

In the Government's announcement today, they are tinkering around the edges. They are rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic while crimes such as shoplifting rocket, police numbers fall and the police face a funding crisis made in the Home Office.

Sarah Jones: I am not sure whether or not the shadow Home Secretary is in favour of this announcement—it is not entirely clear. Perhaps he can come back when he has made up his mind.

The right hon. Gentleman asked several questions that I am happy to reply to. He asked when the White Paper on police reform will come out. It will be this year, I can assure him. We have been working with local police chiefs, police and crime commissioners and the staff associations on what the reform will look like, and we are making the final changes to our reform agenda. As a former Home Office Minister, he will know that we need to make many improvements in respect of performance, accountability, technology, and the structure wherein we have 86 decision makers across the country who, basically, ensure that there are huge inefficiencies in the system while performance and productivity do not rise as fast as they should. Again, I assure him that there will be a significant White Paper that we bring out before the end of the year.

We made the announcement about police and crime commissioners today so that we can continue to work in good faith with the commissioners as we finalise our reform programme. It was right to tell them as soon as we could. I spoke to them at some length this morning, and will speak to them again, not least at their conference next week.

The shadow Home Secretary talks about crime rates. I do not have to remind the House of his and the former Government's record in office. They cut 20,000 police and recruited 20,000 police, so we now have a police workforce that is very new, large numbers of whom have been in post for only a couple of years. Despite the recruitment done at the end of the Conservatives' period in government, prosecution rates did not improve. The system is so unproductive, so inefficient and so badly managed that we need to make huge reforms. We have

been making progress since we came to power—for example, just a couple of weeks ago, we announced an 18% fall in knife murders, 60,000 knives have been taken off the street, and knife crime has fallen by 5%. We are surging neighbourhood policing capacity, which was decimated under the previous Government, and we will have 3,000 extra police in our neighbourhoods by next April.

The shadow Home Secretary asked about the evidence of mayoral success. I encourage him to talk to the mayors and deputy mayors responsible for police and crime. The ability of a mayoral system, with all the public services beneath it working together more collaboratively and more effectively, is clear to see, so I suggest he has a look for himself.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether powers will be transferred to the new models. They were. The new model will not be a faceless committee of local bureaucrats. Its members will be the leaders of the councils and a senior police and crime lead, who will drive the day-to-day work. Accountability will remain, as will the statutory responsibilities. This is an opportunity for us to work across local government and with other partners to make sure that we drive the best possible system.

A saving of £100 million is, I think, quite substantial, not “tinkering around the edges” as the shadow Home Secretary suggests. If he waits a few more weeks, he will see the reform agenda that the Home Secretary is designing in its totality. It will put policing on a much better footing than he left it.

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What the people of Sunderland want is visible and responsive policing. There is no doubt about the decline in recent years. Northumbria lost 1,100 officers under the previous Government. How will the Minister ensure that the savings resulting from these changes are reinvested in the frontline, to improve neighbourhood policing in places like Sunderland?

Sarah Jones: That is of course the aim of this Government: we want to put policing in our communities, where people expect it to be, and make sure that the police are not, as they currently are, spending hours and hours of their day on bureaucratic, very outdated, very unproductive tasks. Indeed, in many cases police officers are actually doing the job of police staff, which is ludicrous. We need to work with our police chiefs to change that, ensuring that our police officers are doing the roles that we need officers to be doing, while the very important crime fighters of our police staff are doing what they need to be doing. That is not currently the case, but we are working hard to make sure that it will be.

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

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. The Liberal Democrats warmly welcome the news that police and crime commissioners are being scrapped. We have been calling for it for years, and I personally called for this in one of my first contributions in this House, after the PCC election turnout in Cornwall was abysmally low, at just 18%. The model was a failed Tory experiment that has cost taxpayers dearly.

[Ben Maguire]

The Minister is right to point out the countless flaws in the overly politicised PCC model, which has diverted much-needed funding away from frontline and community policing. PCCs cost the public millions in council tax every year, yet the impact on their local communities has been negligible. However, transferring the role to mayors is not the answer; it would give even more power to single individuals with dubious democratic mandates and little scrutiny or accountability. The Government must learn the lessons of this expensive and failed experiment.

Instead, the Government should see through their plans for these “temporary” local police and crime boards, but give them the powers on a permanent basis. They should ensure that the money saved from PCCs goes where it is needed most: getting more officers out on our streets and repairing the damage done by years of Conservative mismanagement and underfunding. That is particularly urgent in the light of the slow progress the Home Office has made on its promise to deliver 13,000 new neighbourhood officers; only 200 were added last year, while the number of officers in frontline roles went down.

Will the Minister commit to investing the money saved from these unnecessary PCCs straight into frontline policing and towards proper, effective community policing? Could she outline the safeguards that will be put in place to hold mayors to account with their new-found policing responsibilities? Finally, could she elaborate on her estimated £100 million in savings from scrapping PCCs—has that figure been independently verified, and can she confirm that the funds will be not just transferred to mayors’ budgets but spent on frontline policing?

Sarah Jones: May I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for his robust attack on a policy that his own party introduced as part of the coalition Government in 2010?

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that the impact of our police and crime commissioners has been negligible. I do not think that is true. In many cases, they have done a good job in quite difficult circumstances. The innovation we have seen from our PCCs and the partnerships that they have sought to build have been good. It is not the individuals and teams that we are criticising today; it is the structure.

The hon. Gentleman asked about funding. The PCC election savings sadly will not be coming to the Home Office; they will obviously, and rightly, go to the Treasury. The savings that we are making, through police and crime commissioner functions and the efficiencies we want to drive, are significant—at least £20 million—and we want to reinvest that back into policing, as I think everybody would want us to do.

The hon. Gentleman talked about making sure that the right safeguards and the right model are in place. Police and crime commissioners will continue for the next two years in the areas where we do not already have mayoral processes in place, so we have a good amount of time to work with colleagues on how the new structures will work. That said, there is already a process under way of moving police and crime commissioner functions into the mayoral structures; that is already happening.

At the moment, there are 37 police and crime commissioners. Six force areas will move to the mayoral model in 2027, and there will be more in 2028, depending on how the Bill progresses. The idea is that we see this progress, apart from, as I said, in Wales, which has a different system and does not have the mayoral model.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the work that the Minister is doing on reforming how the police can engage with our local communities, because all of us want to see a closer relationship in that regard. May I press her on what lessons she is learning for my part of the world? In London, the challenge is at a borough-wide level. My own borough commander now requires me to submit freedom of information requests to find out about policing in my local community, and will only meet me twice a year. Panels of people are selected to meet the police, and often their presentations are death by PowerPoint to my local community. The Minister makes a very powerful case about police reform. What lessons can we learn from this process—not just in restructuring to work with mayors, but to work at a very localised level so that we can restore people’s confidence in policing?

Sarah Jones: London is different in many ways due to its size and scale, and policing is therefore structured differently. I expect all local leaders to meet their Members of Parliament regularly, because that is how we can hold them to account and work together. Members of Parliament attend surgeries, have public meetings and talk to our communities, so we understand a lot of the issues that police chiefs face, and it is helpful for them to have those conversations and to learn from one another. I encourage all our police chiefs to make sure that they have good relationships with their local Members of Parliament, because those relationships make up a very important part of our structures.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Minister mentions our excellent police and crime commissioner in Lincolnshire, Marc Jones, and perhaps she might pay tribute to him again. The poor man is tearing his hair out. His force is nearing bankruptcy, and our chief constable says that

“Lincolnshire is the lowest funded force in the country”,

with the lowest number of officers and staff per head of population. There is no point in having another reorganisation and just replacing Marc Jones with Andrea Jenkyns unless we get proper fair funding, so will the Minister commit herself now to funding Lincolnshire police properly?

Sarah Jones: I am very happy to pay tribute to Marc Jones. I have met him to talk about these issues, and there are particular challenges in Lincolnshire that we are looking at very closely. The funding settlement will be announced in the usual way before the end of the year, and we are talking very closely. I am very aware of the issues that the right hon. Gentleman raises.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): I welcome this decision and think that the abolition of PCCs is sensible. The role was ill defined and poorly understood by the public, as the Minister has mentioned, and it failed to add sufficient tangible value to justify its existence. However, I echo the Minister’s comments

about the individuals who have served, particularly Clive Grunshaw, who is the current police and crime commissioner for Lancashire, and indeed the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr Snowden), who is not in his place but who served as the Conservative police and crime commissioner for Lancashire.

As the Minister mentioned, the introduction of PCCs had an effect on the recruitment of chief constables. Their one-on-one relationships were too fraught, and it meant that a small falling-out could lead to chief constables being fired. Can she talk about how we can get more high-quality candidates to apply to become chief constables, and about how their relationship with the deputy mayors might operate?

Sarah Jones: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to our local police and crime commissioners, including Clive Grunshaw, for their work. He is absolutely right to say that there have been challenges. There has been a reduction in the number of years for which police chiefs serve, from about five to about two and a half—so something is happening there. There are also fewer people applying for such jobs as they become available. We want really healthy competition for these roles, which are very significant and important to us. Where there is a large force and only one applicant for the role, something is not working as it should.

My hon. Friend is right to ask questions on the wider question of leadership; we could have a whole debate about that. The former Home Secretary, David Blunkett, is conducting a review for us on how we improve leadership from top to bottom across the entire policing system. Our reform agenda is looking at performance across the board within policing, and at the welfare, training and support that have to go alongside it. We ask a lot of our police, and we do not always give them the support that they need. Those two things, hand in hand, will form a major part of our reform programme.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): May I first pay tribute to Matthew Scott, Kent's police and crime commissioner, who, over many years and through working closely with chief constables, has seen a successive increase year on year in the number of police officers in Kent that he has managed to fund. While I am on my feet, and as one of the few Members of this House who have actually held a warrant, may I also pay tribute to Kent constabulary, which continues to do a superb job under the existing system?

The only example that we have of a mayoral system is in London, and it is a disaster. It has failed. I am sorry, but for the Minister to say that the model of the police and crime commissioner is broken, while seeking to praise the police and crime commissioners, is little short of disingenuous. At the moment, Kent has a basket-case county council, but it is likely to have three unitary authorities and no mayor. Who is going to replace our excellent police and crime commissioner, and how will they do the job?

Sarah Jones: To correct the right hon. Gentleman, there are five deputy mayors within the mayoral system that we have already—not just in London, but in Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and York and North Yorkshire. That model is working really well. I suggest that he talk to someone like Tracy Brabin, who

is bringing together all the different agencies under her model, and the system works very well. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has done an excellent job in working with police forces across the capital to keep us safe. I also pay tribute to Kent's police and crime commissioner, Matthew Scott.

The right hon. Gentleman asks what the arrangements will be where there is not a mayor. The higher-tier authority leaders will provide the board, and there will be a paid person who is the police and crime lead. In some cases, it may be that they are the police and crime commissioner if local authorities make that decision, but it will be for local authorities and leaders on the board to make the decision. That is how the funding model will work where there are not mayors.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I inform Members that I plan to run this statement until no later than 1 o'clock, so we need to have short questions and short answers.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's announcement that she will abolish police and crime commissioners, which is the right move. That said, may I place on the record my thanks to John Tizard, our Bedfordshire PCC? He has always worked constructively with me, and I know he will continue to work constructively until 2028. May I press the Minister on the steps being taken to ensure a smooth transition from PCCs to mayor-led or council-led oversight, particularly in areas such as Luton South and South Bedfordshire, where we do not have elected mayors?

Sarah Jones: I join my hon. Friend in praising John Tizard for the work that he is doing and will continue to do. As I set out, and subject to legislation, the police and crime commissioner model will be abolished at the end of the existing term of office, in May 2028. The transition to the new governance arrangements will be overseen by a small programme team in the Home Office and me, and the legal framework to bring about those changes is expected to be included in a second-Session police reform Bill, subject to parliamentary time. Primary legislation will be needed to make those changes, and we will introduce that as soon as we can. We will be working very closely with existing police and crime commissioners, local authorities and the Ministry of Justice.

One function that our police and crime commissioners fulfil is commissioning victim services, which is incredibly important. When we transition those functions, we need to ensure that we do not drop any balls and that we keep on doing the important work that we need to do, so I am very happy to have more conversations with colleagues about how the model will develop over time. We will ensure not just that we save money and introduce a better system, but that we make people safer in our communities.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): In my constituency of Richmond Park, our policing force has been decimated. We used to have three police stations, and now we have none. The next nearest police station is facing the closure of its front counter, and the Royal Parks police force has been scrapped. People in my constituency

[Sarah Olney]

have no faith that common crimes such as shoplifting, burglaries or antisocial behaviour will be resolved or that offenders will be apprehended. With this in mind, does the Minister agree that the greatest reform needed to improve policing efficiency is sufficient funding, and what conversations has she had with the Mayor of London about bolstering the resources available to the Metropolitan police?

Sarah Jones: Funding is enormously important, and we are providing our police with a real-terms funding uplift this year. We are going through the allocation process at the moment, and we will make announcements in the usual way before the end of the year. I do stress that money is incredibly important, and we are providing more of it, but if we look at the day-to-day activities of many of our police officers, they are not productive, and they cannot be because of the ancient systems that are in place. As an example, if officers download data from a mobile phone, which they need as part of the evidence for a crime, they will be given it in an Excel spreadsheet and they have to ctrl+F to find the things they need. It is extraordinarily unreformed as a system. There are pockets of great innovation, but it is not the same across the whole system. We have to drive efficiencies, and officers are crying out for us to do that to enable them to do the jobs we expect them to do. Yes, money is important, and the Mayor of London has put more funding—much more money—from his own budget into policing, but we need to ensure the police are doing what we want them to be doing.

David Williams (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, proposals have been put forward to take our incredibly hard-working police community support officers off the beat during the evenings. I am campaigning against this, alongside my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner), and hundreds have signed our petition to save our PCSOs. I therefore welcome today's announcement to abolish the role of police and crime commissioner. Does the Minister agree with me and my constituents when they tell me that the money would be better reinvested in visible frontline policing?

Sarah Jones: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I think the PCSO model is extraordinarily successful, not just because the model is slightly cheaper and therefore we get more bang for our buck, but because they do an incredibly important role. They do not have the same powers as police officers, but they have the ability to go in and build relationships with their community to reduce tensions, and in building those relationships, they can predict, see, understand and give everybody else the intelligence we need about the crime happening in our local communities. I think they are really powerful, and one of the awfully sad things that happened under the last Government is that that model was completely decimated. I want to see more PCSOs on our streets because, as I say, they play a fantastic role.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): The train attack that took place in my Huntingdon constituency on 1 November was mercifully prevented from being far worse by the swift actions of Cambridgeshire constabulary

in neutralising the threat and placing the suspect in custody within eight minutes of the 999 call being placed. However, the Government are lucky that that was the outcome. Cambridgeshire is the fourth worst funded police force in England and Wales, and it does not receive the south-east allowance. The current police allocation formula uses data from as far back as 2001. I know that our current PCC, Darryl Preston, and the current mayor, Paul Bristow, share my concern that our police are not adequately resourced, and we went through this last year with the Policing Minister's predecessor. What commitment can the new Policing Minister offer me that she will completely overhaul the formula as part of the forthcoming police funding settlement, and give Cambridgeshire the fairer funding it needs?

Sarah Jones: I join the hon. Gentleman in praising Cambridgeshire constabulary for the way it responded in incredibly difficult circumstances. The quick wit of many—including, of course, the people working on the train such as the train driver and others—saved lives, and we are all very grateful for that. The hon. Gentleman makes a point about funding, and the funding allocation will be made in the usual way before the end of the year. I appreciate the points he made, but there is more money going into policing this year and we will ensure that it is given to where it is needed. As I say, the police reform programme is designed to transform how we do policing so that we can become much more effective and productive in the future.

Alex Mayer (Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard) (Lab): I, too, thank John Tizard for his tireless work in securing extra resources for Bedfordshire police. I tend to agree that the mayoral model is the best way forward. Does the Minister agree that it is vital that we redouble our efforts to move at real pace to ensure there is a mayor in every area of England, rather than let one council block the ambitions of the rest of the area?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming this announcement. The transition to the mayoral model is complex, and people will have different views, opinions and fights locally about what comes next. I believe the mayoral model to be a good one. I think most people see the benefits, and on the whole this Government are in favour of ensuring we have the mayoral model where we can. I certainly think it is the best model for policing.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): The last Labour Government forced through the merger of Staffordshire ambulance service with West Midlands ambulance service, and Staffordshire ended up with a poorer service. There will be and is real concern in Staffordshire that these reforms could lead to a merger and the takeover of the Staffordshire police force by the West Midlands police force. Can the Minister assure the House that that will not happen?

Sarah Jones: The announcement today is on police and crime commissioners, which will not change those boundaries.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. I wholeheartedly agree that the public have not bought into this model, but that does not mean there has not been some

excellent work done by PCCs and their staff with great commitment and professionalism. Will she join me in thanking Matt Storey, the Cleveland police and crime commissioner, for the sterling work he has done in engaging with young people. She heard from some of those young people just two weeks ago, and the voice of youngsters is being heard in Cleveland. Could she also say something about the services commissioned by PCCs, especially in the areas of sexual assault, domestic violence and drug rehabilitation? People today will be in shock about this decision, and they will want some reassurance that their good practice will not be lost in the transition,

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that thoughtful question, and I join him in paying tribute to Matt Storey. I met him, and a group of young people he brought to see me, who were also incredibly thoughtful, and he is doing some excellent work. He points to the challenges of transitioning all these services. We are already learning lessons because, where the mayoral model is coming in, we are already transitioning from the police and crime commissioner model to the deputy mayor model, and we are learning as we go. There are statutory responsibilities for commissioning, such as victim services, and he mentioned sexual abuse and serious and domestic violence services as well. We will ensure that those statutory functions are maintained, and we are already talking to local authorities, our PCCs and other Departments to ensure we get that exactly right. I welcome any thoughts from hon. Members on that.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I welcome the Government's decision, which I think is long overdue. I thank Clare Moody, the PCC for Somerset, who has worked very hard with me over the last 18 months and has visited my constituency three times. She is an inspiration. May I seek some reassurance on behalf of my constituents that extra resources will be put into tackling rural crime? As a result of the austerity under the last Conservative Government, people in my constituency have had bullocks, sheep and, in one incident, an entire flock of 1,500 chickens rustled from their farms.

Sarah Jones: I am very sorry to hear about the incidents of crime that the hon. Lady mentioned, and I am very happy to talk more to her about that. Rural crime is incredibly important, and we are working hard on the rural crime strategy. I join her in praising Clare Moody for the work she has done, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for recognising that the work of our police and crime commissioners has in many ways been excellent.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): I welcome the Labour Government's progress on policing, including Dudley town centre's new police station, which will open this year, and the new police officers being redeployed to Dudley borough in April. Given the urgent need for police reform, will the Minister go one step further and commit to reviewing the west midlands' outdated funding formula, which does not align with local crime and deprivation levels?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right to raise the funding formula. As I said, the allocations will be set in the usual way this year. The White Paper on police reform will introduce some significant changes to how

we do policing, making it much more efficient, productive and targeted at the crimes we want our police to be focused on. We will have more on that in due course.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): May I put it on the record, on behalf of my constituents, that both Martyn Underhill, the initial Dorset police and crime commissioner, and the current PCC, David Sidwick, have done sterling work with their teams to protect and look after my constituents over the years that they have served? Following up on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), I urge the Minister to use the savings that she believes she has made in making this announcement today to support rural police funding where there is a differential between rural and urban. The early part of her statement noted that the police and crime commissioner model was created to increase accountability. She talks about oversight with the new arrangement in non-mayoral authorities. Will she say a little more about to whom the chief constable would actually be accountable in terms of hiring, firing and delivering on the priorities of local communities?

Sarah Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and join him in praising Martyn Underhill and David Sidwick for their work. The police and crime commissioners have a very important function to hire and sometimes remove their chief constables. That will be passed on to the policing and crime board and the police and crime lead who will navigate day-to-day working. They will set the proposed budget, agree the policing precept and be responsible for hiring the chief.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement, particularly the savings that have been identified. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can use the savings in the Cleveland area to reverse the disgraceful decision in 2019 to close Hartlepool's custody suite? So far, there is an unwillingness to look at reopening the suite. Will she meet me to look at options for how we can make it happen?

Sarah Jones: I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend. Of course, local decisions will be made locally and there are limits to what I can do in that way, which is absolutely right. The ability of the police to make their own local decisions is sacrosanct, and we need to ensure we maintain that, but I am very interested to hear how we can ensure he has the right services for his constituents.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): In Thames Valley, we are fortunate enough to have a model that is working under the leadership of Matthew Barber, our police and crime commissioner. Police numbers have gone up, and he has led the creation of the country's best rural crime taskforce and brought in other great initiatives on things such as shoplifting. Instead of throwing the whole system up in the air and scattering it back out across the country with different models for different areas, why not take the police and crime commissioner models that do work and make them the norm for everywhere, and not just in areas that are failing?

Sarah Jones: I join in the praise for the hon. Gentleman's police and crime commissioner, particularly on the rural crime taskforce. I have been very clear on a

[Sarah Jones]

number of occasions that I am not criticising the work those individuals have done, but we believe the model has not worked.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. My constituents want a focus on neighbourhood policing, improving standards and a major police station in the local area. However, after an excellent PCC in Lord Willy Bach, and Sir Clive Loader before that, our current PCC has created an office mired with controversy. Will the Minister confirm that in the council-led model, the focus will get back to policing and public service, as well as improving accountability and partnership?

Sarah Jones: I can absolutely confirm that the focus will be on providing the best possible service to our communities. That means neighbourhood policing and giving the police the powers they need to fight crime, while also holding them to account for everything they do, because their role is incredibly important.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): May I thank Dafydd Llywelyn for his excellent for his excellent work, especially on rural crime and domestic abuse, and take the opportunity to welcome Ysgol Gynradd Nantgaredig to the Gallery today? Today's statement makes clear the absurd complexity of an England and Wales justice system. The UK Government will look to the Welsh Government to help replace the PCC system in Wales, but they have refused the same Government powers over policing. Does the Secretary of State now concede that the Welsh Government is the best place to control policing in Wales, and that devolving the entire justice system to Wales makes logical sense?

Sarah Jones: I thank the hon. Lady for the promotion—I am just a Minister, not the Secretary of State. We are very conscious that the system in Wales is different from the system in England, which is why we will take some time talking to stakeholders there, not least because Wales is not having a mayoral model. To be clear, this announcement is not about the devolution of policing, but structural changes to a model that simply was not working.

Dr Jeevun Sandher (Loughborough) (Lab): I welcome today's reforms. Across Loughborough, motorbikes have been stolen for years and years; it is a huge scourge. I am really glad that a recent police operation helped to seize some of those bikes, and I really glad that we are getting more police and more powers, but there is clearly a lot more to do. Will the Minister set out how today's strengthened governance will make my constituents safer and stop their motorbikes being stolen?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point that a lot of his constituents care very deeply about, and he is right to bring it to this place. The savings we will make from the programme will fund up to 320 police constables, or 430 PCSOs, showing the value for money that they bring. We will ensure that the savings go into policing. The particular crime he talks about is pernicious, and we are talking with police chiefs to ensure we can tackle it. I am very happy to have more conversations with him.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Minister pay tribute to Philip Wilkinson, Wiltshire's PCC, who has realigned policing in my county with the priorities of my constituents? Will she account for the difference between the £100 million that she says in her statement this measure will save, and the £20 million she cited in response to an earlier question? Will she do all she can to ensure that the new formation is less bureaucratic than that which preceded it? At the moment, it rather looks like it will be much the same but without the PCC.

Sarah Jones: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question and I join him in paying tribute to Philip Wilkinson for his work. On the two figures I mentioned, the £100 million and the £20 million, the lion's share of the £100 million is in the cost of the elections that we hold and the £20 million is what we will make in initial savings from this programme, where we want to drive efficiencies. We believe that the elected model has not worked, which is why are getting rid of it, but we are very mindful that we will have to ensure that important statutory functions are maintained.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I associate myself with the Minister's comments on recognising the commitment of PCCs across the country. Despite being from different parties, the Dorset PCC David Sidwick and I have always worked constructively together, and he has been a doughty advocate for the funding we need to police the county effectively. On that note about funding, can I ask the Minister to look again at the police funding formula? Not only does it fail on rurality, as the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) says, but it also fails on the summer seasonal pressures facing my constituency, where upwards of 10 million people visit every summer.

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend and join her in paying tribute to the Dorset PCC. There are PCCs who have worked really well across the party political divide, and we should pay tribute to them for their work and for how professional they have been. She raises a point about the police funding formula, which I know many Members are concerned about. As I said, the funding formula allocations will be announced before the end of the year, and we will also be announcing a major programme of reform.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the Minister for her statement. In 2021, Thames Valley police closed the front desks at Bicester and Kidlington in my constituency, removing a key means for local residents to report to local officers antisocial behaviour, vandalism, mobile phone theft and other crimes that blight and damage their lives. Does the Minister agree that the money saved from today's announcement should be put towards reopening the front desks at Bicester, Kidlington and elsewhere?

Sarah Jones: It is for local police areas to decide how they use their funding. Our priority, to be frank, is to get our police officers out on to our streets to police our neighbourhoods and communities, which is why improving neighbourhood policing is a top priority for this Government. Of course, police stations provide an important function, and there needs to be provision for people who cannot get to the police by any other means, but our priority is to get our police on to our streets.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): Norfolk, which is already progressing through local government reorganisation and devolution, has several existing partnerships working to protect and support victims of crime. Will the Minister meet me and Sarah Taylor, Norfolk's police and crime commissioner, to discuss how we can ensure that these arrangements continue to serve the people of Norfolk? There are worrying signs that some partners are withdrawing services because of these reorganisations.

Sarah Jones: I am always happy to meet and talk about these issues. The transition will happen in 2027, and we need to ensure that we learn from previous transitions and that we do not drop any balls with regard to the services we are providing to local people.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement, although it will have caused some consternation in my constituency. Spelthorne is in Surrey, which is being carved up into two unitary authorities, and recent so-called clarifications by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have stated that there are no promises as to whether they will get a mayor. I ask the Minister to use her good offices to go to that Department and say, "I've taken away their PCC—it's up to you now to make a decision as to whether or not they are going to get a mayor."

Sarah Jones: I obviously talk to my colleagues in MHCLG often, but I will leave to them the decisions they make in the areas they are responsible for. I am, however, happy to pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments.

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement. I want to ask about the transfer to council and mayoral oversight in the context of a challenge I have locally. I have an amazing local police force in Hemel police. Officers often encounter instances of individuals and families who are responsible for antisocial behaviour affecting their neighbours where the landlord of the house or site is the district or county council, but those offices—the county council in particular—are not upholding their responsibilities as a landlord to deal with antisocial behaviour, and the police are therefore struggling to deal with some of these issues despite their best efforts. I wonder whether the Minister would outline how the changes today might tackle that specific problem.

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right. Preventing crime is everybody's problem, and we need to ensure that everybody feels the responsibility of that and works effectively together to tackle crime. Our police cannot arrest their way out of a lot of the challenges that we face. In the example my hon. Friend gave, we rely on the local authorities, which are the landlords of those properties, to ensure that people are behaving as they should. We are endeavouring to ensure that the police, and the local authorities, have the right powers to take action in a speedy fashion. We genuinely believe that if organisations are brought together in the models we are suggesting today, that will improve joint working.

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): The Government are creating new boards from council leaders, but abolishing, not restocking, the police and crime scrutiny panels.

Does the Minister recognise that this risks creating a chasm of scrutiny right when police reform is most urgent on issues like racism, misogyny, police conduct and the ill-governed use of AI? Does she not see a role in better scrutiny for elected local opposition leaders?

Sarah Jones: I think that the accountability that comes with the leaders of our councils, who are of course elected, will be powerful, but I am happy to work with the hon. Lady to ensure that she gets what she wants to see locally. I think that the provision of local authority leaders coming together will be powerful. On her wider points about misogyny, behaviours in policing and AI, we are working on reform through our White Paper to tackle some of those significant challenges. On AI, we will shortly be bringing forward consultation on providing a framework within which it is used.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. I pay tribute to the West Midlands police and crime commissioner, Simon Foster, who has served diligently and ably since 2021. He has always been community focused; he worked with me to secure a police hub in Stourbridge and helped me to negotiate with police estates to retain the old Brierley Hill police station for community use. I am proud to call him not just a colleague, but a friend. He has also reformed victim services, championed youth commissioners and overseen a reduction in all types of crime across the region. Will the Minister join me in thanking Simon for all his work and assure me that good work already established will continue?

Sarah Jones: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in praising Simon Foster and the work he has done. She is absolutely right to say that we need to ensure that where there is good work, we carry on.

I wish to correct what I said in my previous answer: when I talked about AI, I was talking specifically about facial recognition.

Siân Berry: As was I.

Sarah Jones: As was the hon. Lady. I just wanted to be clear about that.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): In Suffolk, the police and crime commissioner's powers will be transferred to a combined mayoralty for Suffolk and Norfolk; the mayor will be responsible for the two police forces. This is only one step away from a full-blown merger of the two forces, which local people are very concerned about. Will the Minister take this opportunity to categorically state that the Government will never allow a police merger between Suffolk and Norfolk?

Sarah Jones: Just to be clear, the arrangements we are announcing today are not changing the 43 models at all. We will bring forward reform, which hopefully the hon. Gentleman will support, and he will have the time to consider it when it comes forward.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in thanking our hard-working named neighbourhood police officers across Portsmouth North, PC Jamie Christian, PC Chris Middleton, PC Nicholas Joyce, PC Ben Treend, PC Hannah Kelleher, PC Matt

[Amanda Martin]

Lamper and PC Susan Smith, for their continued dedication to keeping our community safe? As we look at reforms to police governance, will the Minister ensure that any savings made by abolishing the PCC role are reinvested directly in the frontline? More broadly still, will she meet me to discuss how we can fund our policing more fairly, given Hampshire's unfair allocation?

Sarah Jones: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and talk about the services that she needs in her local community. We will of course ensure that the money we save is directed to frontline policing, because that is where it needs to be. I join her in praising her local police force for everything it does.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I welcome this statement. I have always been opposed to diverting taxpayers' money to police and crime commissioners and their offices, and away from officers who can fight rural crime in our area. I have a couple of concerns. First, what will happen if a police force area like mine is split between two mayors? Secondly, could the Minister write to me to confirm the number of police officers that Avon and Somerset force might expect to employ, and to say whether this will happen by the end of the decade? Rumour has it that the previous police and crime commissioner had 28 or 29 staff, which is a lot of money.

Sarah Jones: Police and crime commissioners make their own decisions about how many staff they have; on average, I would say that they have between 20 and 50. Many of those staff do excellent work, and I pay tribute to them. Many carry out functions that we will need to continue; they are commissioning victim services, for example. I am happy to meet the hon. Lady to talk about her area; there are complexities to do with the mayoral model and how it is playing out that I am happy to discuss.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Conservative police and crime commissioner for my area, John Champion, with whom I have worked well over the past 10 years. In fact, we are meeting the Minister next week to discuss local policing. Can she confirm that the savings that this initiative will provide will go to community policing? That will allow West Mercia police to reverse the 8 pm PCSO cap that it recently imposed; PCSOs have been barred from the streets of Telford and West Mercia after 8 pm.

Sarah Jones: As my hon. Friend says, we are meeting next week, so we can discuss this matter then. I am very happy to join in his praise for his Conservative police and crime commissioner. As I said, we praise PCCs that have worked cross party, and we want that cross-party work replicated in the replacement models. I am happy to have another conversation with my hon. Friend about his local force and the services that his constituents need.

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): As a former deputy police and crime commissioner, I know the hard work that police and crime commissioners do, and I know that the Hertfordshire police and crime commissioner, Jonathan Ash-Edwards, does all he can

to keep Hertfordshire residents safe. The Government's English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill bans councils from making decisions by committee and forces them to change to a strong leader model. Can the Minister explain why the Government think it is appropriate to have police governance by committee, but not local authority governance by committee?

Sarah Jones: That is a question for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and I would expect it to answer it with reference to the structures that exist in local authorities. We believe that the mayoral model is the best model when it comes to policing. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the work that he did when he was {deputy} police and crime commissioner. While we believe that the mayoral model is best, where we cannot have that model at this point, we will have a committee, led by leaders of the council, which I think is right.

Dr Allison Gardner (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, we have a police, fire and crime commissioner. While I welcome the Minister's statement, I worry about the impact on our fire service. Could she reassure me that we will consider the fire service as well, and how oversight of it will be transitioned in areas that now have a mayor, like my area?

Sarah Jones: In 2017, new powers were introduced to enable police and crime commissioners to have a fire-related role. We have the Minister responsible for fire, my hon. Friend the Member for Chester North and Neston (Samantha Dixon), on the Front Bench right now. The transition to the new structures will relate to fire as well as policing; the role will move to the new police boards.

Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) (Reform): While we Reform Members welcome the abolition of police and crime commissioners, will the Minister explain how these reforms will deliver clearer accountability for policing, particularly in areas like my constituency, where a strategic policing board is likely to be necessary, given that the PCC in Cheshire has proved to be one of the starkest examples of failure? He has achieved no meaningful improvement when it comes to crime or policing, and devotes his time to political campaigning.

Sarah Jones: I repeat that I am not here today to criticise the PCCs; I think that they have done a really good job. It is the role and the elected function that is not working. The hon. Member is right to ask about accountability. It is incredibly important we have the right accountability for our police, who have very significant powers and do an incredibly important job keeping people safe. Our expectation is that in the mayoral model, accountability will lie with the mayor; in the board model, the leaders of the council will provide the accountability. We are also looking at how accountability is delivered at national level—this will be in a White Paper that will come out—so that we know exactly what our police are doing and how they are doing it, and so that the inspection regime is beefed up.

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I place on record my thanks to South Wales police and crime commissioner Emma Wools and her team, and Alun Michael before her, for the great work they have done

for my community in Cardiff West? I note what the Minister said about the unique arrangements in Wales, so can I ask that when she consults the Welsh Government, as she is right to do, she also consults Welsh Labour MPs, to ensure that we get the best possible arrangement for Wales? Will she meet me and other Cardiff MPs to talk about a fairer capital city funding deal, and whether some of the money that will be saved through this reform could be ploughed into Cardiff?

Sarah Jones: I am always happy to meet my hon. Friend and other MPs. I appreciate that he supports the approach that we are taking in Wales. I pay tribute to his police and crime commissioner—and of course to Alun Michael, with whom I am in regular correspondence, as I suspect many of us across the House are—for all their work. Alun Michael was a real shining light for the PCC model, and we should thank him for that.

Rebecca Paul (Reigate) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement, and for recognising the great work that has been undertaken by many PCCs across the country. I want to take this opportunity to recognise Lisa Townsend, our excellent police and crime commissioner in Surrey, and her deputy Ellie Vesey-Thompson. We need to be aware that there are employees who support all PCCs' activities who now know that their roles are going in the next few years. It is good to put on record that we thank them for everything they have done. Can the Minister confirm what the announcement means for Surrey, given that we are moving to a unitary model, but that the Government are yet to confirm solidly that we are getting a mayor?

Sarah Jones: I join the hon. Member in praising her local team. She is right to talk about staff. There are about 1,000 staff who support police and crime commissioners. We will work with them to transition—where they need to be transitioned, and where they carry out statutory functions that we need to continue—to local authorities. It is not by any means the case that they are all losing their jobs. It is very important to stress that the function continues as is for the next two years. We will continue to work with staff, and I will be talking to police and crime commissioners about the transition a lot, I suspect.

The hon. Member highlights one of the challenges of the move to the mayoral model: there is legislation going through Parliament, and some decisions are yet to be made. I am very happy to work with her on how things will work going forward, but we are very clear about the model that we want to introduce. Where there are moving parts, we will work as best we can to make sure that we get the right outcomes.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Having sat on a police and crime panel, let me say that I am thrilled to see the abolition of the police and crime commissioner model. This will save £20 million a year, which is the equivalent of an extra 320 special constables. In my area, the Liberal Democrat council is introducing pointless town councils, which raises local taxes. We as a Labour Government will bring down local taxes by abolishing the PCC role, which is very good news.

I want to put on record my thanks to Dave Sidwick, who has been an excellent police and crime commissioner. He is Conservative, and I am Labour, but it does not

matter. We work together in service of the public, and that has yielded very good results. I must confess to having regularly experienced difficulties accessing my chief constable in Dorset. Could the Minister please set out what she thinks are reasonable expectations when it comes to a chief constable engaging with local Members of Parliament, particularly on important issues to do with policing and community safety?

Sarah Jones: I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy): it is incredibly important that chiefs have a good relationship with their local Member of Parliament. It is a two-way street; Members of Parliament bring a huge amount of insight, from all their conversations with constituents, about what is important to their local community and what its fears are, and about where crime is occurring. It is very important that police chiefs have that relationship with them, so that we can help each other to deliver better services.

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): Sarah Taylor, the Minister's Labour colleague and Norfolk's police and crime commissioner, has been turning things around in Norfolk, where PCCs have a very chequered history. She is taking real action on road safety. Under the Conservatives, PCCs sacked all the PCSOs, tried and failed to take over the fire service, and had no rural crime unit in a rural county. One decided that the commute was too long and stood down. How can we ensure that, in future, money goes to my residents' priorities, such as vital safety improvements on the A148?

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman raises the important issue of road safety. I am working very closely with colleagues in the Department for Transport on reforms in that space, which we will bring forward soon. I can assure him that we will put the money that we save into the frontline services that the public expect.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for her statement. It falls to me, the only Essex MP in the Chamber, to put on record my thanks to Roger Hirst, police, fire and crime commissioner for Essex. I had the pleasure of standing against Roger in two elections, and although our political views may differ, he has always been really dedicated to supporting the police and tackling crime in Essex. I thank him for his service. He would want me to ask the Minister about a fairer funding formula for Essex. Specifically, what difference will the decision make to residents in my constituency, who are concerned about an historical lack of neighbourhood policing?

Sarah Jones: I join my hon. Friend in his praise for Roger Hirst, and indeed all other PCCs, who have done some really good work. This Government are prioritising neighbourhood policing. We are putting thousands more neighbourhood police officers into our communities. That is what the public want, and it is what we were elected to do. This money will help us do it.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): The abolition of police and crime commissioners is welcome. My constituents in Chichester are understandably frustrated by how unclear it is what benefit the role brings; they rarely see a PC due to decreased numbers in our area.

[*Jess Brown-Fuller*]

The policing function will pass to a mayor next year. Can the Minister confirm that the savings made will deliver more frontline policing in areas with low numbers of police officers, such as Chichester, so that they can tackle the growth in antisocial behaviour and rural crime?

Sarah Jones: I appreciate that the hon. Member wants to see more police officers in her communities. It is for the Government to set the priorities, and the funding to enable local police chiefs to make the right decisions, but micromanaging where the police go is not my role. She can be reassured that through the neighbourhood policing policies that we are introducing, and through the wider reform agenda, we intend to make sure that there are more police on our streets and in our communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her statement and her answers. It is always good to hear how money is being spent, and how policing can be delivered more effectively. She probably has direct contact every month with the relevant Minister in Northern Ireland, where the problems relating to the moneys available are similar. Will she work alongside that Minister to ensure that what is being done here to ensure effective policing with the moneys available can be done there?

Sarah Jones: As ever, I am happy to meet colleagues in Northern Ireland. We have much to learn from each other about how to make sure that we are policing the streets in the safest and best way.

Point of Order: Rectification Procedure

1 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Cat Eccles on a point of order in connection with the code of conduct to rectify a failure to declare.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to apologise to the House for failing adequately to declare an interest when speaking in the House on 10 June this year during the debate on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Although I referred to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I inadvertently failed to declare that the visit had been funded by Labour Friends of Israel and that it had not yet been processed to appear on the register. That was in breach of the rules and I wish to apologise to the House for the error.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for her point of order. There will be no further points of order on this issue.

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 24 March 2025 (Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Programme) and 9 June 2025 (Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Programme (No.2)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

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

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: 1 to 3, 31 to 33, 37 to 40, 4 to 30, 34 to 36, 41 to 117.

Subsequent stages

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

(4) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Nesil Caliskan.*)

Question agreed to.

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): We now come to King's consent. Do we have a Privy Counsellor present?

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) *indicated assent.*

King's consent signified.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I inform the House that nothing in the Lords amendments engages Commons financial privilege.

Clause 2

NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENTS:
PARLIAMENTARY REQUIREMENTS

1.2 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Lords amendment 2, and Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 2.

Lords amendment 3, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 31, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu.

Lords amendment 32, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 33, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 37, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 38, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 39, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 40, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendments 4 to 30, 34 to 36, and 41 to 117.

Matthew Pennycook: Sustained economic growth is the only route to delivering the improved prosperity our country needs and the higher living standards working people deserve. That is why it has always been this Government's No. 1 mission. This landmark Bill, which will speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure, is integral to the success of that mission, and it will play a vital part in delivering the Government's plan for change milestones of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England and fast-tracking 150 planning decisions on major economic infrastructure projects by the end of this Parliament. The Government are therefore determined to ensure that the Bill receives Royal Assent as soon as possible, and I am pleased that the House has an opportunity today to renew its commitment to this vital legislation and express its firm opposition to attempts to undermine its core principles.

Before I turn to the amendments before us, let me put on record once again my heartfelt thanks to Baroness Taylor for her prodigious efforts in guiding the Bill through the other place, and my gratitude to peers collectively for the comprehensive and rigorous scrutiny to which they subjected it. The Government made a number of important changes to the Bill in the other place, with a view to ensuring that it will work as intended, that its full potential in respect of unlocking economic growth is realised, and to provide further reassurance that a number of its key provisions will achieve the beneficial outcomes that we expect. In the interests of time, I will update the House briefly on the two most significant areas of change.

The first concerns the package of measures we introduced last month to maximise the growth potential of the Bill. As hon. Members will be aware, the Bill's impact assessment estimates that it could benefit the UK economy by up to £7.5 billion over the next 10 years. That is an assessment, it should be noted, that was made prior to the incorporation into the Bill of several important pro-growth measures, including the removal of the statutory requirement to consult as part of the pre-application stage for nationally significant infrastructure project applications—a change that could result in cost savings of over £1 billion across the pipeline of projects in this Parliament. The package introduced last month further bolsters the growth impact of the Bill. It included provisions that further streamline the consenting of reservoirs, clarify Natural England's strategic advisory role, and facilitate the deployment of up to three additional gigawatts of onshore wind and secure the billions of pounds' worth of investment into UK services that come with that.

The second area of change concerns the package of amendments we tabled in July in respect of part 3 of the Bill, which directly addressed a range of issues that were highlighted in the advice the Government received from the Office for Environmental Protection on the new nature restoration fund. They provided for a number of additional safeguards, strengthened and made more explicit those that were already in the Bill on its introduction, and further clarified how the NRF will operate going forward. I emphasise that none of the changes made will affect the process by which house builders interact with an environmental delivery plan, namely by paying a levy to discharge specific environmental obligations through it, and nor do they undermine the strategic approach that underpins the model.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The housing market is absolutely flat and we desperately need to build more housing. What is stopping all this new building, people moving and creating a healthy housing market? It is the appalling stamp duty that everybody acknowledges is the worst tax. The Minister is not the Chancellor, but will he approach his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the autumn statement and see whether she can steal our clothes and promise to abolish stamp duty?

Matthew Pennycook: The Chancellor will set out her decisions on the Budget in fairly short order and the right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for that. I am going to be quite strict in sticking to the contents of the Bill and what is in scope, rather than ranging more widely, as he tempts me to do.

[Matthew Pennycook]

The amendments we tabled in the summer package provided greater confidence that the NRF delivers the improved outcomes for nature that are at the core of the model. I take the opportunity to thank all the hon. Members who engaged in constructive discussions with the Government about the NRF during Commons stages, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Luke Murphy) for his thoughtful participation in Committee, which helped shape my thinking about the package of amendments in question.

I should also make clear that the Government tabled further technical amendments in the other place to ensure that the NRF works effectively across borders, as well as ensuring it is able to operate in the marine environment. Those amendments also ensure that the NRF can be used to support the impact of development on Ramsar sites. In addition, the Government supported an amendment tabled by Lord Banner in the other place to ensure that the NRF can accommodate the development processes associated with large strategic housing sites that are phased.

Turning to the amendments made by peers in the other place, I want to make clear that the Government welcomed the scrutiny and challenge provided, and that we are willing to make sensible concessions in some areas. However, I am afraid that most of the amendments sent back to this place seek to undermine the core principles of the Bill, and for that reason we cannot accept them. Let me make clear precisely why, in each instance where that is the case.

Lords amendment 1 would prevent the removal of existing parliamentary requirements that serve to delay material policy amendments to national policy statements. In short, it is a wrecking amendment designed to frustrate the Government's intention to streamline the process for incorporating into NPSs changes that have already received public and parliamentary scrutiny. Let me emphasise once again that the intent of clause 2 is not to erode parliamentary scrutiny; it is simply about ensuring that scrutiny is proportionate to the four categories of changes the clause covers. That said, I have always recognised the sincere arguments made by various hon. and right hon. Members, as well as by noble Lords, about the importance of transparency and parliamentary scrutiny in respect of NPSs. That is precisely why I provided the Chair of the Liaison Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) with a number of assurances on Report.

For the purposes of clarity, let me repeat those assurances. When the Government of the day intend to make a reflective amendment to an NPS, a statement will be laid before Parliament announcing a review and the relevant Select Committee will be written to. Ministers will make themselves available to speak to that Committee and we will take into account the views of any Select Committee report published during the consultation period. Importantly, the NPS as amended must be laid in Parliament for 21 days, during which time this House may resolve that the amendment should not be proceeded with. In other words, Parliament retains the ultimate say over whether a change should be enacted.

To assuage further the concerns that some hon. Members might have about a reduction in scrutiny as a result of the clause, I am happy to provide a further commitment

today: when a statement is laid in Parliament announcing a review, it will include how the proposed change or changes fall within the four categories of changes to which clause 2 applies. I cannot, however, accept Lords amendment 1 for the reasons I have set out, and I urge the House to reject it.

Turning next to Lords amendments 2 and 3, Lords amendment 2 enables faster consenting of major water infrastructure projects. Crucially, it allows third party providers, appointed by water undertakers, to apply to deliver such projects through the streamlined development consent order route.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Apologies, but I want to go back to the point the Minister was making about Lords amendment 1. As Chair of the Transport Committee, I am slightly concerned that we will get less opportunity and time to scrutinise major infrastructure projects. Had these proposals been law when High Speed 2 was first being considered, instead of a hybrid Bill, it is likely that HS2 would have come under them, and the third runway at Heathrow, plus the national infrastructure network, will do so. Does he not agree that this House and its Committees should have sufficient chance, not just to wait for the Minister's convenience—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Lady will know that that is a very long intervention.

Matthew Pennycook: I recognise the point my hon. Friend makes, but I do not agree that the change will mean Select Committees do not have the opportunity to feed their views into Government. As I said, what we are trying to do with the clause is ensure that the scrutiny provided is proportionate to the changes being made. These are, in most cases, minor and reflective changes. They do not entail the full amendment of a national policy statement; that would have to come via the normal route. I hope my comments on what we expect of Minister's attendance at Select Committees and in other areas provides her with reassurance.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Matthew Pennycook: No, I will not give way again. I will make some progress on the next set of amendments, which I need to get to, as I know many Members wish to speak.

As I was saying on Lords amendment 2, the Government support the intent of the amendment. However, subsections (7) and (8) of the new clause would require consents for listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeological sites to be obtained separately from the application for development consent for dams or reservoirs. We cannot support those subsections.

Lords amendment 3 is also problematic. It introduces additional notification and representation processes into the nationally significant infrastructure project regime when 20 or more residences are to be demolished in constructing dam or reservoir projects, despite such matters already being addressed by the Planning Act 2008. Both amendments are contrary to the intention of the NSIP regime, which introduced a streamlined "one-stop shop" approach to obtaining consents. It is the Government's considered view that the regime already provides ample opportunity for those issues to be considered

before the relevant Secretary of State makes their decision. Numerous adequate heritage safeguards and opportunities for communities and interested parties to have their say about dam and reservoir projects are already in place.

In respect of heritage concerns in particular, the national policy statement for water resources contains explicit policy on preserving the historical environment. When deciding whether to grant consent, the Secretary of State is under a statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building, conservation area or scheduled monument where applications affect these assets. In respect of the demolition of homes, again, the Planning Act already provides sufficient safeguards for the compulsory acquisition of land. For those reasons, I urge the House to support an amendment to remove subsections (7) and (8) from Lords amendment 2 and to reject Lords amendment 3 in its entirety.

Turning to Lords amendment 31, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, the Government are willing to make sensible concessions in some areas. The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), who is not in his place, made a strong case on Report for greater accessibility requirements for electric vehicle charge points. As he knows, I made a personal commitment to him to give further consideration to the arguments he made. The objective he sought is echoed in Lords amendment 31, which seeks to amend the Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018 to enable the mandating of accessibility requirements for public charge points through regulations.

As the House will know, the Government are already working closely with the sector to update the current accessibility standards for public charge points. However, I have been convinced that we should use the Bill to provide further certainty in respect of this matter, and we have therefore tabled an amendment in lieu that is faithful to the original amendment agreed in the other place, with some minor changes designed to ensure that the powers cover all relevant aspects of accessibility for public charge points and that requirements can be placed on all relevant parties that play a role in delivering them. The Government will of course consult before producing and laying the relevant regulations. The Department for Transport looks forward to working with both the Scottish and Welsh Governments on these matters. On that basis, I hope the House will support our amendment in lieu.

Lords amendment 32 would require the Government to publish an assessment of the impact of current regulation on low-hazard reservoirs and to set out proposals for deregulation of such reservoirs within six months of enactment. An assessment of the impact of current reservoir safety regulation has already been published on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' science search website. Furthermore, the Government already intend to set out proposals for the deregulation of low-hazard reservoirs within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent. I also commit to clarifying planning practice guidance for the permitted development right that grants planning permission for the development of on-farm reservoirs, giving clarity to farmers about when this permitted development right can be used. Given that the Government have fulfilled one aspect of the amendment already, and I have committed to fulfilling the rest today, we are clear that there is no need to legislate on the matter. I therefore urge the House to reject this amendment.

Lords amendment 33 seeks to make the first set of regulations for the national scheme of delegation subject to the affirmative procedure. I draw the House's attention to the fact that the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee did not raise concerns about the use of the negative procedure in respect of these regulations. We have already consulted on detailed proposals to help inform the regulations, and the clause itself imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to consult again on the draft regulations before they are brought into force. This consultation duty will apply not only to the first set of regulations, but for any subsequent changes to those regulations. In the light of the two rounds of consultation planned before those regulations are laid, I urge the House to reject this amendment.

1.15 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): Just this week at the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, the new Secretary of State outlined that the Government will not be urging national development management policies to be non-statutory. That almost seems at odds with the Government's direction of travel, which is towards speeding up the national scheme of delegation. Will the Minister explain why the Government are taking the approach of making the guidance non-statutory?

Matthew Pennycook: I am afraid that my hon. Friend is conflating two entirely separate issues. We are committed to introducing a new suite of national policies for development management. We will consult on those before the end of the year. The Secretary of State provided a bit more detail at the Select Committee the other day. This particular amendment—Lords amendment 33—refers to the powers in the Bill to bring forward a national scheme of delegation, and I am making it clear that the sufficient consultation already built into the system does not require it to be taken forward via the affirmative procedure. I hope that reassures her.

Lords amendment 37 would exempt assets of community value from the permitted development right for demolition under part 11 of the general permitted development order. I have reflected on this amendment and agree with the intention of further protecting these important assets. We are already strengthening the protection given to them through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, and we think there are justifiable arguments for removing demolition of ACVs from permitted development rights. However, PDRs are established via secondary legislation, and it would not be appropriate to use this Bill to change particular development rights without consultation. As such, while we cannot support this exact amendment, I am happy to make a commitment today that we will consult on this change to the permitted development right for demolition at the first available opportunity. We hope that with this assurance, and a view to future opportunity for consultation on the matter, the House will reject Lords amendment 37.

Lords amendment 38 would require a spatial development strategy to list chalk streams in the strategy area, outline measures to protect them from environmental harm, and impose responsibility on strategic planning authorities to protect and enhance chalk stream environments. While I appreciate fully the positive intent of the amendment and reiterate the Government's firm

[Matthew Pennycook]

commitment to restoring and improving the nation's chalk streams, I do not believe that it is a necessary or advisable means of protecting those vital ecosystems.

While strategic planning authorities will be expected to work closely with arm's length bodies like the Environment Agency, they themselves will not have responsibility for regulatory systems governing water abstraction or pollution in catchment areas. The SDSs that they will be required to produce will be high-level frameworks for housing growth and infrastructure investment; they will not allocate specific sites. Importantly, as locally-led spatial exercises, local nature recovery strategies, drawing on river basin management plans, will be able to map out chalk streams and identify measures to enhance and improve them, and SDSs will already be required to take account of any local nature recovery strategy that relates to the strategy area. SDSs will also obviously be tested by an independent examiner against those requirements.

It remains the Government's view that the protection and enhancement of chalk streams through the planning system is best achieved through the proper application of national planning policy. As I made clear on Report in the Commons, the measures in the Bill will not weaken existing protections enjoyed by those precious habitats, which are already recognised by decision makers in the planning system as valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity value that should be identified and safeguarded through local plans.

That said, we have been giving this matter careful consideration given the strength of feeling expressed by the Commons on Report, and in the context of ongoing reforms to national planning policy. I am happy to make it clear to the House that I am minded to include explicit recognition of chalk streams in the new suite of national policies for decision making, which I referred to in response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi)—and, as I said, we intend to consult on those before the end of this year. On the basis of that assurance, I urge hon. Members to reject Lords amendment 38.

Lords amendment 39 seeks to prioritise development on brownfield land, increase urban densities and minimise travel distances. The Government have a brownfield-first approach to development. Through the revisions made to the NPPF on 12 December 2024, we broadened the definition of brownfield land, set a strengthened expectation that applications on brownfield land will be approved, and made it clear that plans should promote an uplift in density in urban areas.

In September last year, the Government published a brownfield passport working paper, inviting views on how we might further prioritise and fast-track building on previously used urban land. Again, we intend to take forward those proposals in the new suite of national policies for decision making that I referred to a moment ago.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): The Minister is addressing the brownfield-first approach inherent to the amendment. He opened his remarks by mentioning the Government's target of building 1.5 million homes. The Campaign to Protect Rural England, a very respected independent charity, has identified enough brownfield

land in England alone for 1.4 million homes, so why do the Government persist in rejecting their Lordships' amendments on this matter, against the advice of the CPRE?

Matthew Pennycook: I will come to why we cannot accept Lords amendment 39. I respectfully disagree with the CPRE on this matter—and on a number of others, as it happens. There is not enough land on brownfield registers—certainly not enough that is in the right location or viable to meet housing need across England. That is why we have a brownfield-first, not brownfield-only, approach to development.

Brownfield land is diverse and may not always be suitable. That is why consideration of brownfield land is more appropriately dealt with at the local level, through policy, where a balance of considerations can be weighed up. A legislative requirement for increasing densities does not allow for the consideration of local issues or circumstances, and would risk opening up the possibility of legal challenges to any or every spatial development strategy, which I am sure was not their noble Lords' intent. On that basis, I urge the House to reject Lords amendment 39.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way. He is talking about local pressures for housing delivery and the brownfield-first approach. As he will know, a number of sports grounds in my constituency are increasingly subject to interest from would-be developers. Can he confirm that these proposals will include protections for much-needed sports grounds so that they are not open to that sort of speculative development?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for that question—it is an apt and fair one. Such protections are already in place in the national planning policy framework. I am more than happy to have a conversation with him about the matter he refers to, but nothing in the Bill specifically targets the release of sports fields for development and the protections in national policy still apply.

Finally, Lords amendment 40 seeks to restrict the environmental impacts that could be addressed through an environmental delivery plan. Before I explain why the Government cannot accept the amendment, let me remind the House of why part 3 of the Bill is so important. The current approach to discharging environmental obligations too often delays and deters development, and places unnecessary burdens on house builders and local authorities. It requires house builders to pay for localised and often costly mitigation measures, only to maintain the environmental status quo. By not taking a holistic view across larger geographies, mitigation measures often fail to secure the best outcomes for the environment. In short, as we have consistently argued, when it comes to development and the environment, the status quo too often sees sustainable house building, and nature recovery and restoration, stall.

The nature restoration fund will end that sub-optimal arrangement. By facilitating a more strategic approach to the discharge of environmental obligations, and enabling the use of funding from development to deliver environmental improvements at a scale that will have the greatest impact in driving the recovery of protected

sites and species, it will streamline the delivery of new homes and infrastructure, and result in the more efficient delivery of improved environmental outcomes.

Jon Trickett (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): The Minister is a very thoughtful individual, and he has a wide view of what is happening in the country. Housing is imperative, but in my constituency there was a proposal for 3,000 houses on what was effectively virgin land, and we established that the habitat of 32 rare and protected species would be irrevocably damaged. Does he agree that biodiversity has to be a central plank of the Government's intentions, and will he assure the House that, if Lords amendment 40 is disagreed to, future Governments—who might be less caring about the environment—will not be able to use the law to damage habitats such as those I am describing?

Matthew Pennycook: I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual planning applications, but the Government have been consistently clear that meeting our ambitious development targets need not and should not come at the expense of the environment. Part 3 unlocks a win-win for nature and the economy. Although I cannot commit future Governments to anything, we are confident that the nature restoration fund and environmental delivery plans that part 3 facilitates will result in the delivery of more homes and infrastructure in a more timely manner, as well as improved environmental outcomes.

In respect of Lords amendment 40, I would simply say that there is no convincing rationale for arbitrarily limiting the application of EDPs to strategic landscape matters and thereby preventing their use in supporting the recovery of protected sites and species where appropriate. I remind hon. Members that the Bill is now explicit that the Secretary of State can only approve an EDP where the effect of the conservation measures will materially outweigh the negative effect of development on the conservation status of each identified environmental feature. Moreover, both Natural England and the Secretary of State will have to take account of the best available scientific evidence when preparing, amending or revoking an EDP, and EDPs will be subject to robust scrutiny.

On Third Reading in the other place, we amended the Bill to allow the Government to bring forward regulations setting out how EDPs would prioritise addressing the negative effect of developments. Lords amendment 40 would undermine one of the core principles of the Bill—namely, that the alternative approach provided for by the NRF can apply to both sites and species. For that reason, I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will not, I am afraid, as I am bringing my remarks to a close, but I am happy to respond to any points when winding up the debate.

I appreciate the leave you have given me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to set out the Government's position on the large number of amendments before us. I urge the House to support the Government's position, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): The Opposition join the Minister in thanking our colleagues in the other place for their sterling work. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), who has been our shadow Minister and contributed enormously to the debate in Committee.

I welcome the Minister back to the Dispatch Box for a further discussion on planning and infrastructure, and congratulate him on being the last man standing from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government team that was appointed in Labour's golden summer of 2024. As he surveys the bombed-out wreckage of that ministerial team and knows that he is the only one not to have succumbed to friendly fire, I am sure that he shares my sense of disappointment that, after a year of debate and discussion, we have not made the progress that the British people expect from us in the delivery of planning and infrastructure.

The Opposition have three fairly simple tests to apply to the amendments and the Bill as a whole. First, does this deliver the required reform of our administrative state—the planning process, statutory undertakers, decision makers and all those who play a part—to ensure the swift delivery of infrastructure? Secondly, does this create the necessary incentives for host communities to support and embrace the opportunities that development offers? Thirdly—and most critically, we think, having undertaken many planning reforms during our time in office—does this get the market building the 1.5 million new homes that already have planning permission? The entirety of the Government's target already has consent, with no further loss of green belt or environmental impacts.

Mr Perkins: Many people are concerned about this issue, which the shadow Minister's party also faced when in government. Why does he think that developments do not get built despite their planning applications getting approval?

1.30 pm

David Simmonds: I am going to develop my answer to that, because that is the question we face as a country. We set ourselves a target in the last Parliament of delivering 1 million homes, and we fell just short of that, but when this Government set out their commitment to net zero, I do not think they intended 23 of the 33 London boroughs to have net zero new housing starts, according to a new Bidwells report on the housing market in London. They did not anticipate a 20% reduction in completions of new homes. They did not anticipate a 55.9% drop in the number of new housing starts here in our capital city or a Labour mayor delivering 4.9% of the target set for him by this Government, despite record levels of funding. The context, as we saw today, of growth in our country falling to just 0.1%, is a significant clue to the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

When we assess this Bill and these amendments against those tests, it is clear that whatever lofty ambitions some may have, this Bill fails in the eyes of the Office for Budget Responsibility, because it does not generate the level of growth and contribution that the Government promised. That is reflected in the hasty implementation of large-scale amendments in the Lords that were not even contemplated at the Commons stages. It fails in the eyes of homebuyers—the many people who aspire to get on the property ladder for the first time. It fails in

[David Simmonds]

the eyes of our farmers, who were hoping it would make it easier to create the infrastructure that would make our farming and food sector more efficient. It fails in the eyes of the developers, who are talking about packing up and taking their investment abroad because the UK market is so poor at the moment. It fails in the eyes of the builders, who see no measures in the Bill to address the shortfalls they all face.

It fails in the eyes of the travelling public, who have watched this Government cancel projects such as the expansion of the A12, which was set to support the delivery of thousands more homes. And it fails in the eyes of lovers of nature, because for all that has been said, there is still a grave lack of clarity about how the measures in the Bill will support the ambitions we all have to balance the delivery of new homes and infrastructure with the needs of a nature-depleted country, to protect the natural environment that we all cherish. The Government signalled before they even embarked on this legislation that their intention was to reduce green-belt protections, which raises the suspicion that this is not a holistic agenda; it is about making it as easy and cheap as possible to build on the green belt, without the strategic underpinning that delivers the homes and infrastructure that our nation needs.

Mr Perkins: The hon. Gentleman has not actually answered my question. He is talking about the policies of the last 15 months, but the problem he is alluding to of developers sitting there with planning permission and not building has been going on for 15 years or more. Can he be realistic about what his solution is to get developers to build the developments they have planning permission for?

David Simmonds: As the Leader of the Opposition said at Prime Minister's questions, we would not start from here—we would not have made the mistakes this Government have made, which have led to the crash in house building that I outlined.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I would like to assist the hon. Gentleman. Is the answer not a "use it or lose it" planning permission, whereby a developer loses the permission or the land if they do not build on it?

David Simmonds: We spent a good amount of time debating that issue in Committee. "Use it or lose it" planning consent is one option. Application of council tax at different stages of delivery is another. We could also take a different approach to section 106, to the community infrastructure levy or to the way that local authorities interact with the housing market. All those measures that we either considered in government or have been debating—none of which has been taken up—have the potential to ensure that more of the homes that have planning consent get delivered.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Is not the principal difficulty that so many housing developments have now become unprofitable, and that is why they are not being proceeded with? It is the costs that have been loaded on builders in the last 15 months.

David Simmonds: My right hon. Friend tempts me to fast-forward to a point that will arise later on.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at the end of her Budget statement last year that she was wiping the slate clean, and from here on in it was on them, she was absolutely right. If we look at the impact that the measures taken have had on the deliverability of housing and infrastructure, and the rising costs of government driven by the colossal borrowing spree that has been embarked upon by this Chancellor, there is no question. A Government who have borrowed £100 billion this financial year alone are not in a position to talk about a businesslike approach to delivering housing and infrastructure.

The Opposition share the concern that the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) set out in her intervention, highlighted in Lords amendment 1. Ongoing accountability is crucial. We know there will be trade-offs, whether it is on Heathrow—an issue that affects her constituents and mine—or High Speed 2, which has been very much debated, the delivery of new cross-Thames infrastructure to the east of London, new ports, new airports or new roads. There is a significant parliamentary interest in all those issues, and that process provides an opportunity to explain to the public where those trade-offs sit.

On heritage sites and reservoirs, the Lords have done some excellent work. I am grateful to the Minister and the Government for their willingness to embrace the debate about electric vehicle charging, and I know noble Lords have been extremely keen to support the work being done to deliver that net zero agenda. However, so many elements of the Bill incorporate a tendency to centralisation. The lack of community-level accountability and lack of ability for local residents to have their say about what is happening in their area—for example, on assets of community value—remains a fundamental concern. If we want those communities to embrace development and new homes, they need to be able to see the benefits and opportunities that a development will bring to their lives.

Another issue covered in the Lords amendments is chalk streams. I declare for the record that the River Colne, which borders my constituency, is a chalk stream, the majority of which are in southern England. Given the work done by my party in government, we are determined to ensure that there is an appropriate level of protection enshrined in legislation. We would choose to develop brownfield first. We seek the swifter redevelopment of brownfield sites, including here in our capital city, rather than intruding on the green belt, which is critical for nature, is important for the health of human beings and for leisure and is often a site of sports facilities and agriculture, supporting the lives of our communities. That is another area where, sadly, this legislation falls far short.

It is clear that this Government have a heavyweight majority. Through the measures that are being implemented, the Government are using that majority to deliver a left hook of reducing community voice and community say in planning applications. They are following that with a right hook of reducing protections on the green belt and building on virgin land—as we heard from the hon. Member for Normanton and Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), who is no longer in his place—rather than previously developed land being recycled. That is followed by the uppercut of wholesale top-down council reorganisation, and then a jab demanding that local plans the length and breadth of the country be changed through the

national planning policy framework changes, without there being remotely the capacity at the Planning Inspectorate to deal with those in a timely manner.

A number of Members have said, “Why is this happening, and what do you think needs to be done to address it?” The knockout blow to our housing market in the last 12 months has been delivered by the massive hike in national insurance introduced by this Government, which is leading developers, builders, the whole supply chain and local authorities to fear that they will have to throw in the towel, because it is simply not possible, under such a business-unfriendly Government, to deliver homes and infrastructure that require a pro-business environment.

As the Bill proceeds, pummelling our first-time buyers, hammering our homeowners, bashing our builders, and duffing up our developers, on behalf of the Opposition I simply say this to the Minister: there is an opportunity this afternoon to begin to change course, and to signal that he believes, and we believe, that a different course of action is possible that will deliver the homes and infrastructure that the British people expect. I always enjoy meeting the Minister across the Dispatch Box, and I always keep my spare Conservative party membership form handy just in case he should ever need it—his high standards of professionalism suggest that one day he will make the journey to the dark side. Minister, take the opportunity to say to your colleagues that it is time to add to so many poor U-turns, a good U-turn. Let us get on with the job of delivering the homes and infrastructure that the British people need.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to those in the other place for their work in getting us to this stage. I am conscious of time—it is a Thursday, and many Members want to speak—so I will not go into great depth on the amendments. However, I welcome the changes that the Government have made in the other place, and the work of Ministers to reach a compromise to get the Bill on to the statute book as soon as possible. I particularly welcome the series of pragmatic Government amendments on environmental delivery plans. It is critical to ensure that any system to protect our environment is robust, and the measures outlined by the Government will go some way to quelling some of the fears outlined not just in the other place but by Members across this House on Report. I also welcome reforms to address water supply and encourage the building of badly needed reservoirs, as well as measures to ensure that developers have extra time to commence work when a court grants a judicial review. That sensible and proportional approach will ensure that permissions do not expire through no fault of the developer, and avoid any unnecessary repetition of the whole planning process.

As Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, I wish to touch on two points that relate to the scrutiny we have in this place for planning and infrastructure. The first relates to Lords amendment 1, which is identical to amendment 83, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) on Report. As the Minister said then, this is

“about ensuring that scrutiny is proportionate to the changes being made.” —[*Official Report*, 9 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 756.]

However, we must be honest and say that even amendments to statements can have a massive impact on our communities up and down the country. Sometimes that impact is even bigger than that of Bills, which are subject to the full weight of parliamentary scrutiny.

I understand the point that the Minister made in Committee, which is that the system has led to unacceptable delays, sometimes for several months. I also know as much as anyone that just because a Committee recommends something to Ministers, it is far from a guarantee that the Government will change their policy. However, it is important that this change is not used to ride through significant changes without Committees having the chance to carry out proper scrutiny into how the measure will impact the lives of people up and down the country. It must also not be used to bypass scrutiny when a statement is amended so much over time as to become a de facto new statement. That is part of the role that we were elected to carry out by this House, and it is something that helps give confidence to the whole House that we have properly considered the statements before us. I heard the Minister indicate earlier that the Government will not accept Lords amendment 1, but I gently ask whether he can assure the House that Committees will still be included in the process of amending statements, and that they will not be sidelined when we engage proactively and in a timely manner with that process.

The introduction of this Bill is long awaited, after years of failing to unblock a broken planning system and to build on the scale that we desperately need. Research from Crisis found that nearly 300,000 families and individuals have ended up without a home of their own, while previous Governments failed to act, and as we know, some children do not even have a room in which to learn to walk or crawl. In reality that will not end overnight; it will end only when we have a system that consistently builds the affordable and social homes that we desperately need.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I am not on the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, but I can tell from hon. Friend’s passion that she is an excellent Chair. The use of temporary accommodation, which we have discussed before, costs local councils millions of pounds every year. Does she hope that the Bill, and the fast tracking of social and affordable housing that she talks of, will help to tackle that issue and bring down bills for local councils?

Florence Eshalomi: My hon. Friend is a proud advocate of highlighting that issue, which we constantly raise with the Minister. This is about ensuring that our councils are part of the building process, and the new social and affordable homes package—the £39 billion—will help to ensure that we build those homes. It is good to see that package. The prospectus was announced last week, and bids will be coming in from February 2026—build, baby, build!

1.45 pm

This Bill is the first stage in moving our system in the right direction, and I welcome the big step we are taking with its passage today. As we look at easing and alleviating the planning process, it is important to ensure that in addition to the homes that families want to buy and purchase, we are also building the social homes to help address issues of temporary accommodation and the long and growing housing waiting list.

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

Gideon Amos: The Liberal Democrats welcome a number of the changes made to the Bill in the other place, but it is disappointing that my noble Friend Baroness Pinnock's proposal, which was aimed at ensuring that all unsafe residential blocks are fully remediated, and my noble Friend Lord Foster's proposal on curbing the proliferation of betting shops were not adopted in the other place, where unfortunately the Conservatives were unwilling to support them. It is also disappointing that having removed all pre-application regulations for nationally significant infrastructure projects, the Government have not seen fit to plug the gap with a standard requirement to ensure that communities are properly consulted, as we proposed in Committee. Simply sweeping away consultation requirements is not acceptable.

That said, today we are here to debate those amendments that made it through from the other place, and I want first to acknowledge where the Government have listened and made welcome improvements and concessions. Lords amendment 53, a concession secured by my noble Friend Baroness Parminter, imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to make regulations setting out how Natural England should prioritise different approaches to addressing the negative impacts of development on environmental features, which we argued for in this House. I hope that when the regulations are brought forward, the Government will see the sense of referring to the mitigation hierarchy as the accepted standard approach. I remain confused as to why those words were not included in the amendments. We will continue to push the Government to recognise the mitigation hierarchy as a key environmental principle and development that should be enshrined in environmental delivery plans.

I am also pleased to see Lords amendment 29, and that the Government have listened to the points by Historic England and Heritage Alliance that I raised in Committee. That means that heritage protections remain in transport and works projects. However, there remain amendments that the Government wish to reject that we strongly believe the House should accept, particularly with regard to nature and environmental protection, and the role of communities and their local councillors. Lords amendment 40 would limit the application of environmental delivery plans to issues where approaches at a strategic landscape scale will be effective. I am sure colleagues have received many emails about that amendment from constituents, and for good reason. Indeed, the amendment is essential because it ensures that EDPs are used where they can deliver environmental benefits and address problems effectively on a strategic scale.

In Somerset and my Taunton and Wellington constituency, we see only too well the massive issues caused by phosphates, and an EDP approach for phosphates would genuinely be welcome. That problem operates at a catchment or regional level, and site-by-site solutions are not enough. Protected species and biodiversity are rooted in their habitats, and in particular place and sites, and a simple strategic approach is not enough. We cannot save a protected species from going extinct in one location by creating a habitat hundreds of miles away and expect the same outcome.

Matthew Pennycook: May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to district-level licensing schemes for great crested newts, as an example of where a strategic approach

can benefit a species population? I am not sure it stands—has he reflected on the situation where the type of intervention that underpins EDPs is already in existence and is having benefits for nature?

Gideon Amos: I accept what the Minister is saying and that elements of species protection may require strategic approaches. However, the fundamental point for the Liberal Democrats is that if the Government made a commitment to stronger protections within EDPs from the outset, in terms of the mitigation hierarchy and the protection of species on site, then we would be more open to supporting their position, but they have not made that commitment, so we cannot give our support and Lords amendment 40 needs to remain.

Lords amendment 38, proposed by the Bishop of Norwich and supported by Liberal Democrat peers, is equally important. It would ensure that the new spatial development strategies include protections for our incredibly rare and valuable chalk streams. Shockingly, there is currently a lack of protection for these rare and incredible habitats. Around 85% of the world's chalk streams are in England. They are as rare globally as rainforests, and yet they do not have the required designation as irreplaceable habitats. [*Interruption.*] I do not know where that voice came from, but I am happy to give way.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD) rose—

Gideon Amos: Ah, over there.

Edward Morello: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He will know that West Dorset is home to a number of our rare and precious chalk streams, including the Frome and the Wraxall brook. Does he agree with me that a system similar to the Blue Flag status that we have for beaches would be a relatively cheap and easy way for the Government to provide environmental protections for our chalk streams?

Gideon Amos: I agree with my hon. Friend, who does an excellent job championing the chalk streams in his constituency. A public-facing, recognised standard for chalk streams, similar to those that we have for other environmental designations, would be incredibly welcome.

Charlotte Cane (Ely and East Cambridgeshire) (LD): I also have a chalk stream in my constituency, the River Snail. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we give these chalk streams statutory protection through measures such as those set out in Lords amendment 38, rather than relying on national planning frameworks that can be changed without referring back to this place?

Gideon Amos: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Proper statutory protection for the internationally valuable resource that is our chalk streams is long overdue. I welcome the Minister's words in his opening remarks, but until we see those designations we will continue to advocate for proper statutory protection for chalk streams. We urge the Minister to go further on that.

I now turn to the amendments on democratic and parliamentary accountability. The Bill does not just tinker at the edges but fundamentally concentrates power into the hands of Secretaries of State. Lords amendment 33 would ensure that if and when the Government implement

their proposed regulations to remove powers from local planning committees and councillors, they must come to this House under the affirmative resolution procedure.

Clause 51 gives unlimited power to all future Secretaries of State to remove any and all decisions from planning committees—there is no limit imposed on that power. The very least that the Government should be willing to accept is a commitment to meaningful parliamentary oversight when they bring forward the regulations to remove powers from planning committees. No amount of consultation on a national scheme of delegation will change the extraordinary power in clause 51 and what it takes away from local planning committees, locally elected councillors and local communities. Lords amendment 33 offers only a small safeguard against that centralisation. For such powers to not even be affirmed by Parliament would make a mockery of the democratic process.

Similarly, Lords amendment 1 would ensure that the Government continue to be fully accountable to Parliament on their changes to national policy statements. NPSs govern the biggest projects in the land, from Hinkley Point to Sizewell, from rail freight terminals to the largest solar and wind farms in the world, and transmission lines. It is the fact NPSs are approved by Parliament that provides them with the efficacy they have in guiding decisions on such projects. In the Commons, we proposed a compromise that case law could, for example, be reflected without parliamentary processes, but policy changes on matters as significant as future plans for nuclear power stations should remain fully subject to the decisions of Parliament. We therefore oppose the Government's attempt to remove scrutiny of national policy statements.

Amendments 2 and 3 are about protections for reservoirs, and we oppose the Government's attempt to remove those provisions. We also oppose the Government's intention to remove protections for assets of community value. We remain concerned about proposals for badger shooting on building sites, which remain unamended in schedule 4.

The Liberal Democrats have set out our proposals for housing and planning. Our programme for public housing, which is far more ambitious than the Government's, is for 150,000 publicly-funded and genuinely affordable social and council rent homes per year for local people, not the 20,000 that the Government have established as their target. It is a mistake to pit development against nature and communities. On Second Reading, only the Liberal Democrats voted to stop the damaging effects on nature this Bill could have. The Government have made some changes, which we welcome, but the amendments that remain before us today could be accommodated. They are essential to ensuring that the people and nature affected by building the homes and infrastructure that we need are heard and have their place in shaping that development. We must not give up—the Liberal Democrats will not give up—on ensuring that nature and people are protected in the rush to build the homes that we need.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): This Bill has sparked a keen interest among my constituents. It is important to recognise that people who live in Poole want to protect the environment and the benefits that living in a nature-rich part of the country gives them. I welcome some of the changes made to the Bill in the other place, many of which reflect points raised by me and others

on Report, including the need for a stronger overall improvement test to ensure that changes to environmental protections do not hand developers a licence to trash nature.

As we know, Britain is already one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. We have lost half of our biodiversity, one in six species is at risk of extinction and only 14% of our habitats are in good condition. That is why I urge the Government to accept amendment 40 to safeguard vulnerable habitats and species from harmful developments.

The proposed environmental delivery plans would form part of a framework for nature recovery, allowing developers to pay into a restoration fund to offset environmental harm. That may work for nutrient neutrality, water and air quality, but it simply is not suited to the complex realities of natural habitats or declining species. We risk a situation where destruction comes before detection, with new habitats created too late to replace what has been lost. That means species losing their homes, leading to wholesale extinctions. Developers of years gone by might have got their way with a brown envelope or two, but we cannot buy back lost biodiversity.

Mike Reader (Northampton South) (Lab): I am sure that my hon. Friend has considered the results of the Corry review, which recognises that we have such complex nature legislation in the UK that it makes it incredibly difficult to build. Does he agree that Lords amendment 40 makes it even more complicated for people to build the homes that we desperately need?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: As several hon. Members have already mentioned, we have to find the correct balance between building the houses that we so desperately need and protecting our vulnerable nature and the habitats that we want to preserve.

The Wildlife and Countryside Link states that “some species cannot be traded away for mitigation elsewhere. Once local populations are destroyed, they are unlikely ever to return.”

If we want the Bill to be a genuine win-win for development and for nature, and to keep our manifesto pledge to reverse nature's decline, environmental delivery plans must be limited to where there is clear evidence they can actually work.

Mr Perkins: My hon. Friend is right that there are examples of where species should not be able to be moved, but Lords amendment 40 does not relate to some cases but to all cases, and it sets out in statute that species should never be moved. Does he agree that the Government's approach, which will prevent species from being moved in many cases, is better than setting in statute something that could block so many opportunities?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: I was about to come to that very point, and how serious people feel this issue is. The Wildlife Trusts have nearly 1 million members. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has more than 1 million members, and the National Trust has more than 5 million members. There is a massive base of people in this country who care deeply about nature. If we get this wrong, the risk is not just environmental, but political. People will not take it kindly if their local chalk stream is degraded, for example.

2 pm

For that reason, I am keen to get assurances from the Minister on Lords amendment 38, on chalk streams, which he mentioned in his opening remarks. Four main rivers feed into Poole harbour in my constituency, and the catchment is home to a number of internationally recognised chalk streams. That is why the issue is important to my constituents.

There has been a concerted effort from lobbyists and private interests to scapegoat nature as the chief villain of the housing crisis. In my view, that is just not true. The Government's own impact assessment provided no data saying that environmental protections are a blocker. Nature is sadly being scapegoated to distract from a broken, developer-led house building model that has allowed a few to get rich, while failing to deliver the homes that people need. If developers do not use the planning permissions that they already have, they should lose those permissions, and we should make that clear. Ancient woodlands are not a blocker, wildlife is not a hindrance, and chalk streams are not anti-growth.

Alex Brewer (North East Hampshire) (LD): As I am sure the hon. Member knows, chalk streams are among the rarest habitats in the world. This is not the first time I have mentioned them in this Chamber. Only 11 of the more than 200 chalk streams are protected, and even those 11 are in decline. The problems are over-abstraction, significant pollution and inappropriate development caused by poor planning. Does he agree that protecting these habitats through this Bill is essential, not optional?

Neil Duncan-Jordan: Absolutely. Because of the nature of the constituency I represent, I know that chalk streams are extremely important and should be protected. They are our national inheritance, and we are their custodians. I really hope that the Government will take further steps to align this Bill with a fairer and greener future for everyone.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I will speak to Lords amendment 28, which was introduced in the other place but relates specifically to my constituency. The Eskdalemuir seismic array, which is near the village of Eskdalemuir in my constituency, is a seismological monitoring station established to detect seismic signals from nuclear explosions. To a generation that grew up following the end of the cold war, the facility may seem to be little more than a historical curiosity, but it continues to be a vital asset in global monitoring, in scientific research, and, crucially, in helping to keep the United Kingdom compliant with its international obligations under the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

The Eskdalemuir seismic array has been operating since 1962, making it one of the longest-operating steerable seismic arrays in the world. The facility is geographically remote, in a low seismic noise environment, and highly calibrated and sensitive, enabling the detection of even small seismic signals at a vast distance. Over recent years, its seismometers have picked up the sonic boom from Russian jets in UK airspace, and have detected underground nuclear tests in North Korea. On one occasion, it was able to detect signals generated by the detonation of around 100 tonnes of conventional explosives in Kazakhstan. All that is clear evidence of the unique nature of the site and its capabilities.

Some might wonder what the site has to do with the Bill. What could the Bill's impact be on the maintenance of this vital scientific facility, which is crucial to our national defence and our undertakings under international treaties? In many rural constituencies in Scotland, the march of large-scale wind farm developments continues, encouraged by the Scottish Government. The forces acting on wind turbines cause vibration in the turbine—vibrations that can travel underground for many kilometres, with obvious consequences for facilities that require seismological quiet for their effective operation.

As some Members may know, the desire of wind farm developers to push the boundaries of where their infrastructure can be located, and the boundaries of the guidance against which their applications are assessed, has led to challenges to the Ministry of Defence. A previous attempt by a developer to site a wind farm at Little Hartfell, which is in the consultation zone of the Eskdalemuir seismological monitoring station, led to judicial review proceedings against the MOD. On that occasion, the challenge did not dispute that the MOD is entitled to devise and enforce a policy to protect the array from interference with its detection capabilities—it concerned the way that proposed developments were prioritised—but the lesson is clear: developers will seek to push the boundaries of where and how their developments may be sited. Ministers must be aware of that, and willing to take measures to protect against that, where issues of national defence are at stake.

The key consideration is this: in a dangerous and difficult world, we must not water down our defence systems or let down our allies to squeeze out what, in a national context, is a small amount of extra electricity. The UK Government should robustly refuse to entertain novel technologies within the 15 km exclusion zone proposed by the Eskdalemuir working group, which would replace the existing 10 km zone. That should also apply to those applications already in the planning system that were submitted by developers who continued to pursue their projects aggressively, with full knowledge that work was ongoing to review the exclusion zone. Our national defence must come first. I am sure that most people would agree that this is an area where an abundance of caution is well justified. It would be concerning if Ministers and the MOD were pressured into going too far in the name of net zero.

I am not necessarily objective, because I am the Member of Parliament with the largest number of wind turbines in their constituency, either consented or built. I believe that industrial-scale wind farms are bad generally for the locality, but there need to be specific rules around them when national security is in question, and we have to protect our credibility with our international partners.

Any loosening of the rules on infrastructure developments around facilities like the Eskdalemuir seismic array, or passing up the opportunity to reinforce existing rules, would send entirely the wrong message, both to potential developers eager to exploit new opportunities to construct even more wind farms, and to our international partners, who rely on our ability to contribute to our own defence and our collective defence. Lords amendment 28 is an opportunity to underscore the protection needed for facilities like the Eskdalemuir seismic array, and I want this Government take those protections forward.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I add my thanks to those in the other place for the work that they have done on this Bill, and particularly on Lords amendment 1, which I will explain my thinking on in more detail.

I stand to speak on this issue because of the importance of scrutiny of Government policy by the Select Committees of this House. While this House has an important scrutiny task, and Bill Committees have their job to do, there is a valuable role for Select Committees in scrutiny because of the depth of knowledge of the Committee teams, which are made up of Members, experienced expert staff, and Clerks. That depth of knowledge can be very helpful to Ministers and Governments, who can get useful input as policy is developed, and Select Committees have a particular role in relation to national policy statements.

More widely, I say to Members on the Treasury Benches that although I massively appreciate the work that the Minister has done to ensure that we lean into this issue—which I will touch on in a moment—Governments of whatever party need to be mindful when they are pushing legislation forward. We get elected with an agenda and, quite rightly, we are impatient to push things through, but we need to be mindful of the importance of parliamentary scrutiny. We diminish that at our peril, because we risk a slippery slope. One day, a mad, bad or dangerous Government—do not tempt me on that, given the past 14 years—could misuse the system. We need to stress-test what is being proposed by the Government of the day in the light of that important fact.

We have 13 national policy statements covering types of national infrastructure. I do not need to go into detail on that, but they include energy, transport, waste water and waste. The normal process has been that these statements are laid before the House, and Select Committees are involved. For time reasons, I will not go through the technical detail of how that works, but basically, Select Committees have an important role to play in scrutinising any changes to national policy statements. The Government are concerned that this can take too long, and have decided, as the Minister has explained, to introduce a new reflective amendment procedure. Under that procedure, the Government would not be subject to the existing statutory obligation to respond to a resolution of either House, or to recommendations from a Committee of either House, regarding the proposed changes.

The key question is: what is proposed to replace the existing procedure? As the Minister has said, there will continue to be a public consultation on reflective amendments—the smaller category of amendments that might be introduced. The Minister will need to write to the relevant Select Committee, and Ministers must make themselves available to appear before the relevant Committee to explain why the proposed changes to the NPS mean that the reflective amendment route is appropriate. The Minister and I have been discussing this for months—I have been speaking on behalf of those on the Committee corridor—and I thank him very much for his time.

On Report, the Minister said at the Dispatch Box that Ministers would appear in front of Select Committees “as far as is practicable”.—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 757.]

I raised with him the concern that although “practicable” may be a legal term, it does not really work for Select Committees, because there is a question about what it

means. The Minister could be on holiday, or could be visiting a constituency somewhere else in the country, and it might not be practicable for them to appear before a Select Committee. I have been a Minister, and it is right that Ministers should be accountable to this House. That should be a priority; it is the job of a Minister to steer legislation through the House, politically and practically. I know that the Minister has been looking closely at whether he can give us a reassurance that Ministers will be expected to appear before a Select Committee if required to do so, not just as far as is practicable.

Under the new approach, an amended national policy statement will be laid before Parliament for 21 sitting days—I am glad that the Minister has been clear that it will be sitting days, not days during a recess period; that is critical—and the Government will respond to any Committee reports during that time. However, they no longer have a statutory obligation to respond. I hope that the Minister can reassure me further, at the Dispatch Box, that they would be expected to do so.

Speaking on behalf of the Committee corridor, we are very clear that we would play our part in ensuring that these matters were turned around within a proper timeframe, and there would not be unnecessary delays. There is a great team of people behind our Select Committees. If you were not in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would say that I am privileged to work with probably the best set of Chairs of Select Committees that we have ever had, but that would cut you out, and you did important work that set the tone for us all. You were a leader in this field when you chaired the Women and Equalities Committee; we follow in big footsteps. There is a very talented team of people on the Committee corridor who want to make sure that this process works. We take very seriously our responsibility to scrutinise Government legislation, and our role in getting it through Parliament, although not necessarily without amendment. We will work very closely with the Government when submitting our views.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Those who are watching this debate might think that we are just debating tedious parliamentary processes, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi) made clear, national policy statements have impacts. We are about to consider—in some detail, I hope—the national policy statement on airports, which would result in 15,000 people in my constituency losing their home, and whole communities being wiped off the face of the earth. That is why it is so critical that we get this procedure right; otherwise, we will not carry the community with us.

Dame Meg Hillier: I think I can reassure my right hon. Friend that, as the Minister has made clear at the Dispatch Box, very large changes would go through the old process. There is no watering down of that, which is absolutely right and proper; the Government are leaning in the right direction on that. Our concern was about turning smaller amendments into reflective amendments. The Minister outlined four categories of amendment; when he sums up, I would be grateful if he could clarify who decides which of the four categories an amendment would be in, and whether there is any prospect that the process could be misused by a future Government. I cannot imagine that the Minister would misuse it, but in a bad world, could this process be abused by the Government of the day?

2.15 pm

Will the Minister also reiterate from the Dispatch Box some of the things we have discussed over the past few months, including that he would be expected to engage with the Select Committee—not just to appear if requested, but to engage early? That has been clear from the discussions we have had, but it would be helpful if it were said from the Dispatch Box, because “no surprises” is a good maxim for politicians. Never surprise a constituency MP, a Select Committee Chair or a Select Committee, because that can cause challenges. We are reasonable people, and the Select Committee system means that we want to engage as early as possible, whatever party we belong to. Of course, we are cross-party Chairs on the Committee corridor, but it is absolutely proper that the Chair of a Committee works with the Government of the day, whatever their party. I certainly did so when I was chairing a Committee as an Opposition MP. It is important that we understand that and play that role.

Early engagement is better. There is nothing that needs to be hidden from a Select Committee, and we have a well-worn route for making sure that we deal with confidential, sensitive information properly, whether through a reading room mechanism or private briefings. Obviously, we prefer to do most of our work in public, but we recognise that in order to reassure this House and the British public, at certain times—maybe not forever, but at certain moments in time—we may need to have a conversation earlier, when information is not fully in the public domain. I think we are trusted to do that responsibly and well, so could the Minister reassure us on that as well? Although I think he has confirmed this, could he confirm again for the record that the clock ticks down only on parliamentary sitting days?

I thank the Minister for his engagement on this matter. I also thank the other House for taking parliamentary scrutiny so seriously that it tabled Lords amendment 1, but I have had enough reassurances from the Minister to be convinced that the Select Committee corridor is being treated with the respect it deserves. I just hope that in his summing up, he can reiterate those points and answer the questions I have asked.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I do not wish to detain the House terribly long; I just want to cover three matters, if I may. The first is Lords amendment 38, which deals with chalk streams. As the Minister knows, because I have told him before, my constituency is chalk stream central—as is yours, Madam Deputy Speaker, as my constituency neighbour. The River Test, the most celebrated of chalk streams, rises in the north of my constituency. We also have the Anton, which flows through Andover, and most famously the Bourne rivulet—about which books have been written, such is its beauty and importance. I know the Minister appreciates the importance of these incredibly rare ecological environments, which are almost unique to southern England.

I heard what the Minister had to say about the appropriateness of spatial development strategies for protecting chalk streams, but he will know that those of us who are concerned about this issue have been disappointed by the seeming reduction of enthusiasm for protection of chalk streams since this Government came to power. Obviously, the chalk stream recovery

pack, which had been hard-won in negotiations with the previous Government, was abandoned. In May, amendments to this Bill that sought to protect chalk streams further were voted down. The Minister is a good chap—he and I get on well—and at every stage he has reassured the House that he wants to do more for chalk streams, but we have yet to see the beef. Even today in his opening remarks, he said that he is minded to take further steps elsewhere to protect chalk streams. Given the Government’s record over the past 12 months or so, I am afraid that that is not terribly reassuring, so when he sums up, I would be very grateful if he could be a little more detailed about what exactly he intends to do.

Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): The right hon. Member will know from his own constituency that there are some fantastic campaigners trying to protect chalk streams. In my patch, I have the River Chess Association, the Mend the Misbourne project, and the Chiltern Society. Does he agree that it should not be down to committed campaigners to protect these chalk streams, and that it needs a statutory underpinning?

Kit Malthouse: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. In my constituency, I have groups of volunteers who work very hard, including on the Anton river in Andover, and do a fantastic job. In fact, that river flows through part of the town centre, but gets lost, and it is about to be opened up with a new riverside park running down Western Avenue. I am pleased to say that I played a small part in that scheme obtaining a levelling-up grant from the previous Government.

People in my constituency value these chalk streams almost as if they are members of their family. They are part of the identity of towns such as Whitchurch, Overton, Andover and other villages in my patch and yours, Madam Deputy Speaker. They would take the protection of those chalk streams almost as seriously as the protection of their children. Many Members—not just me—have campaigned for such statutory protection, and I would be interested in what the Minister has to say. I do not entirely accept his argument that spatial development strategies are completely inappropriate. As he knows, they can flag up areas of planning constraint and discuss corridors and green infrastructure. If there is a green infrastructure corridor, it is a chalk stream. Certainly in my part of the world, they are treasured such that a new mayor—if we have one next year—would be required to look at them as protected corridors and say as much in their plan.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I absolutely agree with the right hon. Member and support everything he has said about chalk streams and nature corridors. Does he think it would be helpful if the Bill went a bit further in trying to reinvigorate the natural world in densely populated urban areas? Since he has an enormous knowledge of London, does he not think that London would be so much improved if some of the unfortunately now underground rivers could be opened up, so as to give people a sense of what their natural world is really like?

Kit Malthouse: I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Interestingly, he may or may not recall that when I was a Westminster councillor, we had a project

in Westminster called “Hidden Rivers”, which signposted where those rivers were. If any Members find themselves on the platform at Sloane Square station, for example—just a couple of stops away—and look upwards, they will see a socking great big pipe going across the top of the platforms carrying the River Tyburn. It rises at Marble Arch, where Tyburn convent is, and where the Tyburn tree used to stand for hanging people. It flows down, across the platform and into the Thames. The same is true, I think in the right hon. Gentleman’s constituency, where the Fleet flows down towards Fleet Street and into the Thames. People value and treasure such rivers, and they should be protected. I want to hear a little more on that from the Minister.

For those of us who would support new settlements, for example, SDSs might be important for the protection of chalk streams, because they can point towards the areas where new settlements should be and protect such things as river catchments. For chalk downland constituencies like mine, that is key. While I accept that the Minister will get his way and get his party to vote for the second time against protection for chalk streams in this Bill, I would like to hear a bit more detail on what he is minded to do—I take him at his word—how firm that mindedness is, and when we can expect some of the protection to come forward, because this is an urgent matter on which many of us have campaigned for many years.

The second thing I lament about the Bill, and ask the Minister to clarify, is its impact on neighbourhood plans. I have asked him this question in the past, particularly in the light of new housing targets. Both my borough councils, Basingstoke and Deane, and Test Valley, have had significant increases to their housing targets. I do not mind that necessarily, but the question is where those houses go. I have encouraged villagers and communities across my constituency to take advantage of neighbourhood plans and to put them in place. The significant alarm now is that some of the local plan implications from the new housing targets that are flowing through are riding roughshod over those neighbourhood plans, some of which took years to put in place.

The Minister has given me an undertaking in the past that extant neighbourhood plans would not have to be varied in the light of those new housing targets, until they came up for refresh, and that constraints, such as protected landscape, would pertain. I would be pleased if he could reassure us on that point when he sums up.

Dr Roz Savage (South Cotswolds) (LD): I share the right hon. Gentleman’s concern about the impacts on neighbourhood development plans of the new housing targets. In my constituency, those plans were blown out of the water by the new targets. In the Cotswold district, 80% is protected landscape and of the remaining 20%, half is floodplain. Does he therefore share my disappointment that the Government are opposing Lords amendment 39, which would have forced developers to prioritise brownfield sites and save our countryside?

Kit Malthouse: I sort of agree. We should be pushing developers towards brownfield—that is absolutely right. Brownfield first was the policy of the previous Government, and it makes lots of sense. The key thing, which I am sure the Minister accepts, is that if we are to overcome this problem with the generational contract—that we

who are housed will build houses for those who are not—there has to be a compromise. For me, that compromise has always been neighbourhood planning. Far too often in my constituency, villages and towns feel as if planning is something that is done to them. They dread the land promoter showing up to ram some inappropriate planning through. Some of that compromise can be about beauty, and I lament the fact that the design standards were taken out of the NPPF and that that word is not used. *[Interruption.]* I welcome the Minister’s nodding—that is great.

I have often said that in my constituency—for Members who do not know, it is 220 square miles of beautiful chalk downland—if developers would build thatched cottages, we would have thousands of them. People would be more than happy for developers to build villages such as St Mary Bourne all over the place, if they look beautiful and fit in. Unfortunately, we get the same ersatz development that everybody else gets around the country. We need to crack that. The other thing is putting planning in the hands of local people, and I hope the Minister will try to preserve that principle in the Bill.

My third point, briefly, is about an omission in the Bill that the Minister and I have discussed before, which is the problem of undeveloped consents. My concern is that the Bill will stimulate the land promotion industry and stimulate lots of applications. However, as the shadow Minister pointed out, when the housing market is flat, stamp duty is at penal rates, when interest rates remain stubbornly high because of Government borrowing, and when the development industry is crippled by taxes, we will not get the level of development that the Minister aspires to—certainly not towards the 300,000 a year target and 1.5 million by the end of the Parliament. Instead, we will see a stacking up of consents, as we have seen in some parts of the country already, where there are thousands and thousands of undeveloped consents. The industry will bank them. In the absence of a market into which it can sell, it will occupy itself by banking the land for times when hopefully things will come good.

Similarly, I am afraid that we will see some of the large infrastructure projects going through the process—the Minister and I are keen to see them accelerated—but people waiting for more propitious economic times to bring them forward, notwithstanding the lack, therefore, of the facility to the British public. I urge him to consider, as he looks to the next stage of his planning reforms, what he will do on undeveloped consents. I think I have said to him before that the Government should force local plans to have a 10-year housing supply that also takes into account granted consents. Then, developers can see a 10-year horizon, as can local authorities, but they also can see that if they want a life beyond 10 years, they will have to start developing that which they already have. If we deal with that issue, we will also deal with quite a lot of the resentment people feel when they see particularly large-scale planning applications coming forward. They ask, “We’ve already got 400 down the road that haven’t been built. Why do we have to take another 400?” Of course, the local council has to put huge amounts of work into the local plan, notwithstanding the fact that it might already have a five-year supply that has been consented but does not count toward the future target.

[Kit Malthouse]

This is a problem that Governments, including my own, have struggled with for some time, and it is one I struggled with when I was Housing Minister, but I hope the Minister will give some thought to at least giving councils the option of having a 10-year supply in which granted consents count. He might well find that he gets a lot more houses built.

2.30 pm

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): The natural environment in my constituency is fantastic. It is of huge value to my constituents and it underpins Norfolk's greatest economic driver, tourism, which is fundamental to rural areas like mine. I am especially proud that we have so many beautiful chalk streams and rivers, the most impressive of which, the River Nar, forms the northern boundary of my constituency and lends its name to the villages of Narborough and Narford. Because of its national importance, this river is designated a site of special scientific interest—one of only 11 chalk streams in the UK with that status.

The Nar is well known for its populations of brown trout and the globally threatened European eel, but even this river, protected by its designation since 1992, has a history of damage and ongoing degradation through pollution from farmland, sewage treatment works and road drainage, as well as man-made modification of its channel and floodplain, and abstraction both from the river itself and from the chalk aquifer that supplies the calcium-rich, clean water on which these systems rely. Natural England reports that 50% of the River Nar SSSI is “not healthy” and “not getting better”, which it classifies as “unfavourable—no change”.

Last year, at South Acre in my constituency, I had the pleasure of visiting part of the Nar that has been restored by landowners, with the help of the brilliant Norfolk Rivers Trust. I am so pleased that landowners and this Norfolk charity are working hard to restore the river to better health. Thanks to their efforts, the other 50% of the river is in “unfavourable—recovering” condition, or “unhealthy, but getting better”. Sadly, none of the river is classified as in “favourable condition”. Other chalk streams and rivers in my constituency include the Rivers Wissey and Little Ouse and their tributaries, such as the River Thet, which runs through my home town, Thetford. All are important features of our local natural environment, but none is healthy enough to be considered an SSSI.

Just two weeks ago, I visited the Little Ouse and met the Little Ouse Headwaters Project—another small, local charity that is trying to restore the river and the fens in its catchment. I also visited Blo' Norton fen. Blo' Norton is a small village at the southern edge of my constituency, near Garboldisham, which we in Norfolk pronounce “Garbisham”. The story at this location is a familiar one: the Little Ouse has been canalised—straightened, over-deepened and embanked, separating it from its floodplain. It is polluted by phosphates, nitrates, silt and pesticides running off agricultural land, and by sewage treatment works and poultry units adjacent to the river.

Local volunteers have been working hard to restore the catchment for the past 23 years. I pay tribute to the chair of trustees, Dr Rob Robinson, trustees Reg and Rowena Langston, and conservation manager Ellie Beach,

all of whom I was pleased to meet recently. They gave me a tour of the fen, for which I sincerely thank them and all the other volunteers involved in the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. We as a nation owe so much to volunteers like them, who safeguard our natural heritage for future generations. It is disgraceful that previous Governments have left small charities like this and others struggling to restore these globally rare habitats, 85% of which are in England, many in my constituency.

This Government are rightly proud of their efforts to improve our rivers by holding water companies and other polluters to account, delivering an ambitious programme of reforms to fix the water system, and managing and resetting the water sector. I am pleased that water companies will invest £2 billion over the next five years to deliver more than 1,000 targeted actions for chalk stream restoration, as part of our plan for change, and that the Government are investing £1.8 million through the water restoration fund and the water environment improvement fund for chalk stream clean-up projects. As a new member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I am keen to see the effect of this Government's improved funding for environmental land management schemes, including six landscape recovery projects in chalk stream catchments. One of those awaiting a decision on funding from DEFRA is in the headwaters of the Little Ouse. I hope it gets the funding it deserves.

I believe it is time we legislated to put chalk stream protection on a permanent footing, buffered from the vagaries of policies and funding by future Governments, so that we leave a permanent legacy of environmental protection of a globally rare resource. We must do more to protect and restore chalk streams. I urge the Minister, whose opening speech I listened to carefully, and others to take up opportunities now or in future policy considerations to protect precious environments like those in Norfolk. They are irreplaceable, and they are, in their own right, crucial to our local economies and to growth.

Dr Savage: On behalf of many of my constituents, I rise to speak in strong support of Lords amendment 40. Nature unites us in a way that few other things can. Even the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) told me of his love for nature after the Second Reading of my Climate and Nature Bill. Our love for the fields, woods and waterways that shape our lives can cut across deep political divisions, ages and backgrounds. We all want future generations to walk the same landscapes, hear the same birdsong and feel the same sense of belonging to the natural world that so many of us have known.

Lords amendment 40 recognises that truth. It would ensure that nature is treated not as an optional extra but as an essential—something that must be protected and restored alongside meeting our urgent housing need. It would limit environmental delivery plans to areas where a broad, strategic approach genuinely works, as the hon. Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan) mentioned; examples include nutrient neutrality, and water and air quality.

Without this safeguard, the Bill risks undoing decades of progress in protections for our most vulnerable species. A big-picture approach cannot replace the precise protections that bats, dormice and great crested newts depend on. One cannot ask a dormouse to move house, or offset repeated local losses somewhere else. If we

allow that pattern to continue, national extinction becomes a real possibility. This is how nature, the web of life, works. We cannot dismiss small snails simply because they are small. It is the smallest creatures that inhabit our topsoil that form the foundation of the entire ecosystem.

In South Cotswolds, the bond between people and nature is strong, but our area is one of the most environmentally constrained: about 80% of the Cotswolds district lies within the Cotswolds national landscape, and with much of the remainder already developed or at flood risk, we will struggle to meet our target of more than 1,000 new homes every year. Constituents who cherish our wildlife and landscapes have written to me expressing heartfelt concerns about what that level of development will mean for the places that have defined their lives.

The Labour manifesto promised planning reform that “increases climate resilience” and “promotes nature recovery”, yet the Secretary of State recently rejected amendments that would do exactly that. His “Build, baby, build” slogan suggests that we must choose between growth and nature, but that is not true: wildlife protections are not blocking new homes. Councillors and developers alike point to land availability, infrastructure and delivery capacity as the constraining factors. There is no justification for weakening nature protections when it is entirely possible to build in ways that benefit both people and planet.

Lords amendment 40 reflects a real cross-party consensus and is backed by the Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB and the Better Planning Coalition. It would offer clarity, reduce legal risk and support sustainable development while strengthening genuine nature recovery—which, incidentally, will also help in climate change mitigation. Above all, the amendment recognises that we are not, and do not need to be, in conflict with nature; we are part of it. This is our chance to show that good planning can be both responsible and ambitious, and that we can deliver the homes that people so urgently need while safeguarding the natural world that sustains us all.

I urge Members and the Government to support Lords amendment 40. I urge this House to choose clarity over confusion, evidence over ideology, and long-term stewardship over short-term slogans. Today we have the chance to choose a planning system that is efficient and fair, that is good for business and for communities and, above all, that is good for the wildlife and landscapes that define our country. We can choose to honour our responsibility to future generations, who will judge us not so much by how fast we built, but by what we protected and what we passed on.

Mr Perkins: Building 1.5 million homes to tackle the housing crisis at the same time as protecting British wildlife is an issue that the general public are rightly passionate about, and one that Government must get right for people, for nature and for the economy. The Environmental Audit Committee, which I chair, initiated an inquiry to explore that exact question last November, and we will shortly be able to share our conclusions and recommendations to Government. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is a central plank of the Government’s plan to unlock the planning system in order to deliver the housing and infrastructure that Britain needs.

I was interested in the contribution of the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who rightly identified the issue of developers sitting on

land. I have to say, as someone who has been in local and parliamentary politics for 23 years, that that has always been the case, so it was unconvincing that, having identified the issue, he did not seem to have any solutions. He listed a number of things that the Government might consider, without enlightening us as to whether he supported any of them, so it is clear that the Government will have to crack on alone if they wish to address this important issue.

The Bill has been significantly improved during its passage, and my original concerns about part 3—which were shared by many others—have been allayed. I have been through enough debates on legislation in this Chamber where people have accused Ministers of not listening to give credit to my hon. Friend the Housing Minister for having listened to criticisms and skilfully clarified how the Government will respond. I thank him for that.

Unfortunately, the Minister’s work has been made more difficult by briefings that characterise nature as a blocker to development. In fact, research from the Wildlife Trusts found that bats and great crested newts were a factor in just 3% of planning appeal decisions. I think these anti-nature narratives are at best lazy, and often unhelpful; they distract from some of the more significant challenges in the planning system, such as the lack of resources and skills in local authorities to support good planning applications. Tackling those genuine planning barriers, alongside this Bill, will be essential to building the homes that we need.

Lords amendment 40 would limit environmental delivery plans to only certain environmental impacts, including water pollution, water availability and air pollution. Addressing environmental impacts at a strategic level, as enabled by the EDPs introduced by the Bill, has the potential in some circumstances to deliver more benefits for the environment and faster planning outcomes. In some circumstances, this strategic approach would absolutely not be appropriate—for example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan) alluded to, harm to a site-loyal species would often be impossible to redress in a different location.

I do believe, though, that it is reasonable to steer clear of stipulating on the face of the Bill which environmental issues EDPs could be developed for in future, as Lords amendment 40 would do. If guided by current robust scientific evidence, or evidence that might come to light in future, it is possible to imagine that a strategic approach for addressing environmental impacts could be found to be appropriate for issues beyond only water and air pollution.

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend is making an extremely considered speech. On that point, which was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan), we now have concerns being expressed by virtually every environmental organisation we have ever worked with, including SERA—the Socialist Environment and Resources Association—Labour’s own environment campaign.

Could there not be a compromise here? If the Government were really clear on the process for the future, the issues that my hon. Friend has just raised could be considered. Then, we could see that there was a strategic approach on some issues, but that there would be further consideration on others that the Government

[John McDonnell]

could come back to. There is potential there for a compromise with the other House as part of this ping-pong process.

2.45 pm

Mr Perkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that contribution. The Lords amendment is sensible and well-intentioned. Even if it is rejected, as the Government are minded to do, he makes an important point: we need to get clarity that, in the majority of cases, the approach would be of this narrower type. The Minister has given us some assurance that, in the event we start seeing certain EDPs misused, we will be able to scrutinise that process, so it will be interesting to hear what he has to say in response to my right hon. Friend's point.

I welcome the Government's package of amendments during the Lords stages, including one that specifies that robust scientific evidence must be used by Natural England to develop an EDP. These improvements largely address the original concerns of the Office for Environmental Protection. However, I urge the Minister to consider proactively providing a list of environmental issues that might be considered suitable for EDPs. That would provide reassurance that this new and powerful tool will be directed only towards diffuse pollution issues such as those set out in amendment 40, where EDPs will have environmental benefits and provide the most value for development.

Amendment 39 would embed a brownfield-first approach in the new SDS. Building on brownfield land can help to revitalise towns and cities, as well as avoiding developing greenfield land. However, it can be more expensive: there are often clean-up jobs to be done on site. In large urban centres, brownfield development is often still profitable, but, in smaller towns such as Chesterfield, the additional factors in developing brownfield land can make development unprofitable, so sites sit undeveloped, as the Robinsons site in my constituency has for more than 20 years now. It would therefore be good to hear from the Minister what more the Government can do to promote development on brownfield land.

Both nature and safe, secure housing are enormously important to people, and our constituents deserve both: they deserve to breathe clean air, to live in safe and healthy homes, and for their children to be able to play in a local river, free from pollution, but they also deserve to have affordable housing in the communities in which they live. That is the balance that the Government must strike. Although the EDPs introduced by the Bill are an important tool, they are only part of the answer to solving the housing crisis and to improving our natural environment.

This is an important Bill and is much improved. We need to ensure not only that we get it passed as soon as possible but that the work of protecting nature does not begin or end with this Bill and carries on long after it.

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): I will focus my comments on Lords amendment 38. I have heard from many constituents who are deeply concerned about the potential environmental impact of this Bill and how it might affect the River Itchen, the precious chalk stream that runs through my constituency of Eastleigh. The River Itchen is a site of special scientific interest and a special

area of conservation, but despite these designations, it has been subjected to repeated sewage discharges by Southern Water, threatening its delicate ecosystems and putting species at risk. We have incredible natural habitats that are being destroyed because existing protections have failed. Indeed, in the latest Environment Agency assessment, Southern Water was handed a two-star rating after causing a shocking 269 pollution incidents last year, including 15 classified as serious.

According to the 2024-25 chalk stream annual review, 83% of England's chalk streams are failing to achieve good ecological status, which is disgraceful. That is why Lords amendment 38 is so important to my constituents and to communities across the country who live alongside these extraordinary habitats. There is no reason why we cannot have a thoughtful planning process that protects our precious natural environment and delivers the social and affordable housing that our communities desperately need, with the infrastructure to support it. We have an opportunity to show that development and environmental responsibility are not competing interests, but shared objectives. By embedding these principles in the Bill, we can address the housing crisis while simultaneously protecting our rivers, habitats and green spaces.

Lords amendment 38 would establish much-needed new protections for chalk streams and impose a responsibility on strategic planning authorities to enhance chalk stream environments. I saw the urgent need to address this issue when I visited with representatives of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust this summer, when I was able to test the water quality of the River Itchen. With the help of experts, we saw at first hand the very low levels of biodiversity and high nitrate levels. I fully support the proposition that spatial development strategies must list chalk streams in their strategic area, and safeguard them from irreplaceable damage by outlining clear measures to protect from environmental harm.

Greater and appropriate consideration for our chalk streams is long overdue. I welcome the fact that, under Lords amendment 38, local spatial development strategies would vary according to the needs of the particular area, allowing strategies to set different balancing points between local conservation and development needs in different places. It is disappointing that the Government are unwilling to retain the amendment. Will the Minister instead commit to strengthening existing planning mechanisms and ensure that water companies are held to account, so that chalk streams are protected? This is such an important issue for my constituents, and anything less than a cast-iron guarantee is not good enough.

People across the country deeply value and treasure our natural environment. We need to deliver the housing and infrastructure that are vital for our communities, but let us not treat our chalk streams, wildlife and habitats as an afterthought.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): I declare an interest as a vice-chair of the Climate and Nature Crisis Caucus.

At the outset of my contribution to today's debate on this important legislation, there are a few general points that are probably worth reiterating. There need be no conflict between house building and nature; the real conflict is between greed and the sort of country we want to build. After 20 years of planning deregulation,

time and again we see profiteering trumping public need and the protection of the countryside; cost cutting where communities deserve quality; and low-density, high-price housing while families wait for council homes.

Since we last debated the Bill in this place, Key Cities has published a very useful report, which highlights that in a survey of its members, only 6% cited the planning system as the primary obstacle to house building. More than twice that figure pointed to developer delays, so I hope that we will shortly see similarly major Government legislation to tackle the profiteering developers that are blocking the delivery of genuinely affordable housing in this country.

The recent announcement of plans for towns built within a new forest shows that good development and nature recovery can go hand in hand, and we must go further. A democratic programme of mass council house building could easily avoid the clashes that so often mark the developer-led system. What is needed are well-funded councils with the power to assemble land and identify the best sites for new homes—building not grey estates that are shaped by the defeatism of low expectations, but cohesive, thriving communities that are built for life to flourish. That is the solution to the housing crisis and would create a country that puts people and nature before profit.

I welcome the several important amendments tabled by the Government in the other place. In my view, the most important is the stronger overall improvement test for nature recovery, which I campaigned for on Report. It is very good news that these amendments have substantially allayed the concerns of the Office for Environmental Protection. Nevertheless, it is clear that environmental experts and conservationists continue to have some concerns, which the other place has sought to address through Lords amendments 40 and 38 in particular.

Our Labour Government were elected on a clear manifesto promise to reverse the nature crisis in this country, so it is essential we get this right. That is particularly urgent for our endangered species and irreplaceable habitats, including chalk streams such as the Rib, Beane, Ivel and Mimram, which criss-cross North East Hertfordshire and bring joy to so many people's lives. I genuinely welcome the comments that the Minister has made to allay the concerns of nature experts, and I will dedicate my remaining time to a few short questions that I hope he can address in his wind-up.

First, given the need for legal certainty, can the Minister confirm that the overall improvement test will guarantee that irreplaceable habitats and species cannot be covered by EDPs, and if so, will the Government set out a list of environmental features that they consider would be irreplaceable?

Secondly, can the Minister confirm whether any EDPs are currently under consideration or development by Natural England, or proposed by the Government? If so, will any of them be affected if Lords amendment 40 remained part of the Bill?

Thirdly, will the Minister give confidence to the many constituents of North East Hertfordshire worried about potential impacts on the wildlife we love by once again putting on record that the Government recognise the difference between diffuse landscape issues such as nutrient pollution, where strategic scale action is best suited for nature restoration, and protected sites and species that cannot easily be recreated elsewhere?

Fourthly, given the widespread interest in this Bill shown by many of our constituents and by the wider nature sector, will the Minister consider providing further transparency and accountability through a Government amendment in lieu of Lords amendment 40 to ensure parliamentary approval of EDPs beyond diffuse issues such as air, water and newts?

Fifthly, given that the “Catchment Based Approach” annual review published this autumn found that a third of chalk streams do not have a healthy flow regime, that over-abstraction due to development pressures is one of the main threats facing these crown jewels of our natural heritage and that there are currently no planning policies specifically protecting chalk streams, can the Minister set out in more detail how the Government foresee planning authorities being able to direct inappropriate development away from struggling chalk streams within the process of setting spatial development strategy plans, and would he consider opportunities for this through regulation, if not through the Bill?

Sixthly, will the Minister provide further certainty from the Dispatch Box about ensuring that chalk streams are specifically added to the national planning policy framework as an irreplaceable habitat, and will he set out when this might happen given that an update of those provisions has been delayed since 2023?

Seventhly, as one reason put forward for Lords amendment 40 is that it would mitigate concerns about the weakening of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, what reassurances can the Minister give my constituents that these iconic animals will not be at risk from widespread licences to kill in EDPs paid for by developers in the absence of Lords amendment 40?

Eighthly, can the Minister confirm whether the Government have assessed the potential impact of proposed biodiversity net gain exemptions on the private finance for nature markets that will be essential for the delivery of EDPs?

Ninthly and finally, can the Minister reassure those who have raised concerns that the current legislation may allow money committed to the natural restoration fund to be redirected to other purposes?

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Madam Deputy Speaker, you will know that I like to start on a positive note and by looking for common ground, so I will begin by recognising and welcoming the fact that the Government have made some concessions in the other place on this Bill, which is a positive step. Unfortunately, I have to disagree with the Minister's claim that this is a win-win for nature and housing, and express my continued concern that the Bill, especially part 3, has not had the full reconsideration it needs to ensure we have a genuine win-win. The reason, unfortunately, is that the Government seem to be stuck in the view that there is a zero-sum game between nature protection and house building. That is wrong and unhelpful; it is a complete misconception. Despite making some concessions, the Government lost a lot of trust among the general public by claiming at the outset of the Bill's progress that they would do no harm to nature protection. The Government were forced to reconsider and recognise, not least by their own official adviser, that that was not in fact the case.

3 pm

As other Members recognise, a huge number of UK citizens who are members of well-respected and well-trusted organisations such as the National Trust, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trust are deeply concerned that the Government are still digging their heels in and refusing to support Lords amendments that would improve the Bill. I will come on to the details in a minute.

I want to hammer this point: economic prosperity, social justice, and environmental responsibility and protection can and must all go together. They are fundamentally interlinked, which is why the Green party has been campaigning so passionately and is so outspoken on these issues in relation to the Bill—specifically, the importance of democracy in the planning process, the importance of people’s voices being heard, and the importance of ensuring that the planning process is focused on tackling the most important part of the housing crisis, which is the social housing crisis. I repeat yet again in this Chamber that I am frustrated that the Government still refuse to set targets for building social housing. We must protect nature and act responsibly, not only because it is our own interests now, but for future generations. Some parts of the Government seem to have been trying to pitch this as a contest between builders and blockers, but that is completely misleading. Actually, it would be more accurate to call it a contest between *carte blanche* for bulldozers versus building the better Britain that is rooted in taking care of our natural environment and in social fairness.

I will briefly run through some of the Lords amendments before us today and explain why it is so disappointing that the Government are refusing to accept them. Lords amendment 1 relates to the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of changes to national policies. The hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi) and the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) articulated the arguments very powerfully. Unlike them, I am not completely reassured by the Minister’s warm words, which is why I believe it is important that we agree with Lords amendment 1.

Lords amendment 33 requires the affirmative procedure for regulations to change the national scheme of delegation. This is fundamental. It is about whether Parliament will get to properly scrutinise any proposed changes to the degree to which citizen voices and the voices of their local representatives—councillors—are able to be heard in the planning process. This is a core element of local democracy and there is a real risk that, in bulldozing this through, the Government are aiming to achieve some minor cost savings for a few developers at a huge cost to democracy, creating a democratic deficit within the planning system. Greens are on the side of democracy and not on the side of developer profiteering, so we strongly support Lords amendment 33.

Lords amendment 37 just seems to be really reasonable. It is about clarity on how assets of community value are dealt with. I note that the Government are making some concessions, saying that they will consult. I very much hope they will, but in the meantime what better way to ensure that the Government are serious than by supporting this amendment?

On Lords amendment 38 and chalk streams, many Members have already spoken very passionately about this so I will not hammer the point, but it is crucial to

protect our chalk streams and what better place to do that than in this Bill? They are globally significant and irreplaceable habitats.

Amendment 39 seeks the prioritisation of building on brownfield land. The Minister has said that this Government have a “brownfield first” approach, but they have actually widened the definition of what brownfield means. It is really quite extraordinary. Even as things stand, despite Governments saying for quite a while that they are pro-brownfield building, the actual rate of prioritisation of brownfield building has declined significantly over the past 15 years. Figures from the CPRE were cited earlier by the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith); the CPRE has also said that there is already planning permission for 770,000 new houses on brownfield land. We could get halfway to our house building target if those buildings were just put up. Again, it is not the planning process that is holding back building.

Finally, amendment 40 is absolutely crucial. It seeks to limit environmental delivery plans to the areas where we have the strongest strategic understanding that environmental benefit can be generated and would eliminate the risk of destruction of irreplaceable species and habitats of site-loyal species. We need a nuanced approach here, and amendment 40 would provide that. It recognises that for some factors, such as air quality and water quality, a catchment or area-wide approach could be sensible and helpful, instead of having a blanket approach to establishing EDPs, with everything we talked about at great length in Committee—the lack of safeguards, the lack of initial assessment of what is going on and the ability for developers to have a “get out of jail free” card with paying into those things when they claim it is not possible because of viability, all of which are significant problems. Amendment 40 would take a more precautionary approach to the application of EDPs.

It is very important that this House reiterates to the Government that we cannot give *carte blanche* to bulldozers and that we must build better and build in harmony with nature, protecting nature and economic prosperity and ensuring that everybody has a decent, affordable place to live. We can and must do these things together.

Mike Reader (Northampton South) (Lab): I did think that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) was about to slip up in her round-up and say, “Build, baby, build”—we almost had her there.

Every single week at my constituency surgeries, people come and talk to me about housing shortages, whether it is people living in overcrowded or temporary accommodation or people facing homelessness, and tomorrow will be no exception. In fact, the impact of the storms in my constituency this weekend will likely mean that hundreds of people—perhaps up to a thousand—will be temporarily removed from their temporary mobile homes in the Billing aquadrome, putting additional pressure on our housing system. It is right that the Government are stepping forward to try to fix this. I have been quite surprised in some of the debates on this Bill that we are not putting more focus on how we deal with homelessness, and that a debate on planning and infrastructure has instead come down in many cases purely to a discussion of nature.

Dr Chowns: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there are many hundreds of thousands of homes sitting empty around the country and that this Bill will not do anything to address that issue, which could go a very long way to addressing the problems of homelessness that he claims to worry about?

Mike Reader: The hon. Lady is completely right that there are lots of empty homes. I am sure that there must have been some amendments tabled by the Greens that I have missed, and that they have been constructive and worked with Government to address that issue through the Bill.

Working cross-party is what I have always tried to do in this place. I am proud to chair the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment and the all-party parliamentary group on infrastructure and, even though the Minister and I do not always agree with the membership of the group—I have to say, some of the members do take unwarranted and quite grotty shots at the Minister—I am proud to chair the Representative Planning Group with Simon Dudley, the treasurer of the Conservatives.

I am pleased that the Government have recognised a point that I raised on Second Reading that solving the housing crisis will take action from the whole Government. The Bill is part of it, but there are many other things that we need to do to fix the mess that we inherited. I am also reassured that concerns that I and others raised on Second Reading around how EDPs will work have been recognised, particularly in some of the latest amendments, as well as by the Minister's comments on how brownfield will be dealt with, which is so critical.

Mr Perkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the housing issues that we all see in our constituencies, so it is interesting that there are so few advocates for building. Whenever there is a new housing application in Chesterfield, we get people who live nearby saying, "I'm a bit concerned about this." We get lots of people saying that there are not enough houses around, but they never come to us and say, "Please can you support one of these new applications?" Maybe we should give some thought to how we do more to build for the huge number of people who are inadequately housed. We need more housing developments in order to actually create some movement in favour of these developments.

Mike Reader: My hon. Friend could not be more right. Part of why we set up the cross-party Representative Planning Group was to create an opportunity to bring forward legislation that ensures that all voices are heard in the housing debate, not just the loudest and angriest and those with lots of spare time on their hands.

I am surprised by the position taken by the Conservatives. I was fortunate to sit on the Committee for the devolution Bill. I recognise that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), is an absolute expert on local government, and he made some amazing contributions in Committee. As I am sure many Members did, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition's speech at the Conservative party conference. She spoke about cutting bureaucracy, making things easier and cutting down on Government waste, but many of the amendments the shadow Minister spoke to do just the opposite. Lords amendment 3 adds

layers of process to how planning will work, increasing the risk of judicial review. Lords amendment 33, which the Minister picked up on in his opening remarks, adds more parliamentary processes to trying to fix our housing crisis. I hope when he sums up that the shadow Minister will reflect on whether his position on this Bill reflects the position of his party's leader and her call to cut regulation and get us building.

A big point here is trust. Unfortunately, the debate on this Bill has focused on trust—trust in Government, trust in those who build our homes and trust in our planning system as well. If Members turn their mind back to May 2024, they will remember a soggy former Prime Minister standing with music playing behind him. I was at the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum to discuss housing and how we get Britain building. I listened to a whole industry that is completely fed up with the Conservatives. One of my engagements over the past couple of days was a discussion on trust in the housing sector. I cannot remember the specific numbers, but I am thinking of figures from a couple of years ago: less than 20% of people had trust in developers, and less than 20% of people had trust in our planning process. It is clear that the whole process is broken, and that is why we are working really hard through this Bill to try to fix it.

We have talked about the big amendments, but I want to turn to EDPs. If any Member wants to come in on that, I am very happy to discuss it. There are other great measures in the Bill that will get lost. Lords amendment 34 seeks to improve how heritage sites are dealt with. That is fantastic for somewhere like Northamptonshire, which has one of the largest volumes of country houses, manors and stately homes in the country. Lords amendment 39 addresses brownfield sites, and Lords amendment 31 addresses the provision of EV charging, which came up a couple of weeks ago when I was on "Politics East" alongside the hon. Member for Ely and East Cambridgeshire (Charlotte Cane) and we were asked for our views.

I am pleased that the Bill is returning to a focus on planning. Some of the amendments show that the Government have listened to those who build and those who want to see homes built across our country, and we are taking positive steps. EDPs have been the topic of a number of speeches. It is a contentious point both for my hon. Friends and Opposition Members. I have worked in the industry for 20 years, starting out fixing houses that were filling with sewage, and ending my career working on mega and giga projects around the world. I have experience of planning, approvals and consenting processes—in the most developed countries and in some developing countries as well—and I can tell Members that our process is so complicated.

I referenced the Corry review in my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan). The review, commissioned by DEFRA, found that we have some of the most inefficient, inconsistent and difficult-to-navigate nature legislation in the world, and it is not fit for purpose to drive nature recovery. Those who argue against change argue for the status quo, which has led to our country being one of the most nature-depleted in the world. That is what those who argue against this Bill argue for. They argue for more of the same, more nature destruction and a process that does not deliver homes.

Neil Duncan-Jordan: My hon. Friend intervened on me, mentioning the Corry review, and then he cited it in his own contribution. I am sure that he would like to acknowledge that the review specifically warns about a bonfire of red tape and supports targeted changes. Does he agree that amendment 40 aims to support pragmatic reform, limiting EDPs to where they can make a positive impact, rather than where they will do harm?

3.15 pm

Mike Reader: I take the point. The intention behind amendment 40 is well meant: there are situations, as my hon. Friend has said, in which EDPs will not be needed and there are other ways to deal with those situations through existing legislation. Having such a finite definition in the two lines of the amendment, which people have focused on, creates what the Corry review calls the problem: adding more complexity to the process, not simplifying it.

I make no complaints about starting my career as a civil engineer and working in industry, and I am sad to hear that some of my colleagues and some of those across the House have the idea of greedy developers taking all our money and making millions of pounds in profit without ever giving back to society. I am interested to see, through this debate, the very well-funded environmental lobby. I am proud to be an environmentalist and to be on the executive committee of SERA, Labour's environmental campaign, and I am grateful for the debate that I have had with them through this process to inform my thinking.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) mentioned the 3% stat—that only 3% of planning fails because of nature. The truth is that the assessment would be done long before the planning process, and I am surprised that schemes have got to that point on nature, as I am by the 3%. The chances are that when going for early viability on a project, nature challenges will be looked at. The complexity and difficulty of delivering in this country, because of the way our legislation is set up and the risk entailed, means that many schemes do not go ahead in the first place. I recognise the stat that my hon. Friend has presented, but it is slightly erroneous, because when there are particular nature issues, most projects will never get to the planning stage.

It is really positive, however, to see so much brought forward by the Government—nearly 30 additional amendments—as they listen to the concerns of both Houses, to the environmental lobby and to those who build the homes we desperately need, and improve the way the law will work. There are great opportunities to support that going forward.

I will add a slight observation. Through my career, I coined the three Cs of delivery, whether I was working on the Hudson tunnel connecting New Jersey and New York; on the Peru reconstruction programme, a project that was championed by another former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, as a great example of exporting British expertise to a country and working in partnership to deliver nature restoration, new schools and new hospitals; on airports in places such as Keflavik in Iceland; on regeneration schemes in Greece; or even on the new hospitals and prison programmes and other things that we deliver in our great country. Those three Cs are certainty, commerciality and cost—and that is what it fundamentally comes down to when delivering projects.

I am sure that everyone recognises that cost is critical. If we cannot afford it, we cannot deliver it, so we have to get cost right. At the moment, viability particularly impacts our ability to deliver homes, and this legislation will start to improve that. Commerciality is the one that I like to focus on when talking to industry, because how we deal with apportionment of risk, change and commercial incentivisation is how we get projects working well, such as the Silvertown tunnel in Newham, and how we get projects that run very badly, such as HS2 phase 1, where the commerciality is completely wrong.

The third C is certainty. That is what we have to give the market after 14 years of failure of a Conservative party that flip-flopped on housing policy, with a revolving door of Housing Ministers—we have all heard the tropes, so I will not keep going. We need certainty in the timescales around how planning works. The Bill simplifies that, making it clear how the judicial review process works and how we go through planning to give certainty to the communities that are impacted and which need those homes.

The amendments brought forward by the Lords that the Government are taking forward improve that certainty of the legal process. Even yesterday, in the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, we heard evidence on the planning process for delivering community energy, and I am sure everyone would support more small-scale community energy. We were blown away by the complexity of planning regulation in trying to get, say, solar panels on to a community building or a small-scale district heating scheme delivered in a local community for their benefit. The scale of complexity of our planning process is such a big challenge. As well as improving certainty of the legal process, the Bill improves certainty around nature protection. The engineering design process will help us deliver more homes and protect nature.

Since coming to this House, I have chosen to add a fourth C to my three Cs: the C of courage. What I saw in industry was a Government who did not have courage and that flip-flopped on their decisions, and that meant chaos. As has been said, we have inherited a system that fails to deliver the homes that we desperately need. That political courage to do difficult things, find compromise and drive forward is what the Bill represents, and I am proud to give my backing to my Government in pushing it through and ensuring that we deliver homes for people right across our country.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): There has been great anxiety about the possible negative impacts on the environment of this legislation. Lords amendment 40 seeks to restore site specific protections for most cases where they do not involve wider issues, such as nutrient neutrality, but it has been opposed by the Government, as we have heard. Can we trust the Government to have their heart in the right place when it comes to nature versus development? We can pick up a big clue by looking at what has been happening in my constituency in West Sussex.

For the last four years, Horsham district has been contending with the complications of water neutrality, which is often wrongly confused with nutrient neutrality. It is something that applies only to my district and a couple of neighbouring areas. It concerns possible damage to a unique wetlands habitat on the River Arun, which is home to a rare species of snail and many birds. On a

precautionary basis, Natural England has required a halt to any new development that would increase demand on the water supply abstracted at nearby Hardham. Natural England was wrong to impose such a draconian limit. The “not one litre more” rule prevented small businesses from building even the smallest project, and that seriously damaged the local economy.

I do not have any confidence either in the abrupt lifting of all restrictions, as happened a fortnight ago. Southern Water promised to reduce its Hardham abstraction licence by a few million litres a day, but that will not make any difference, because it never used the whole allowance anyway—it was just a notional figure set many decades ago.

The immediate crisis for Horsham is how the changes affect planning and housing development. For the past four years, Horsham has been in the ludicrous position of having to obey two totally contradictory laws. One law says that we have to build circa 1,000 houses a year. The other law says that we cannot build any houses at all if they will use extra water. That is clearly quite a challenge. As a result, we have fallen from being an authority that exceeded our housing targets, even though they were very stiff, to being one of the worst performers in the country, with a land supply of less than one year. It is literally against the law for us to obey the law.

As a result, Horsham district council has been forced to accept a series of applications that contradict its local plan and that make complete nonsense of the strategic plan-led development that the Government always profess to support. Complications around water neutrality have prevented a new local plan from being passed, and that has prevented major new environmental provisions from coming into force.

This legal nonsense has done huge damage to Horsham district and is set to do even more. The sudden lifting of water neutrality today leaves us exposed to wholly unconstrained development, which will do major damage to our environmental ambitions. It is impossible to make meaningful plans for new schools, clinics and community services to support the enormous targets that we will be forced to build when speculative developments keep going through that have none of those attributes.

Do I trust the Government to have their heart in the right place when it comes to environmental protections? No, I do not. Do I believe that they are committed to plan-led development? No, I do not. The Government are content to see holes dug all across our beautiful Horsham countryside in the hope that it might dig the Chancellor out of her own personal fiscal black hole.

I therefore urge the Minister to support Lords amendment 40, and to consider how the legislation is affecting my constituency. I invite him to meet me and Horsham district council so that we can explain that what he is doing will not just sacrifice our local environment but make the delivery of affordable housing—my overall key ambition for Horsham—harder, not easier.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call John McDonnell.

John McDonnell: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for leaving the Chamber for a period. I had to chair a meeting upstairs that had been planned for a number of months.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Mike Reader) mentioned the 4 Cs. I will add a fifth: confidence. One problem that we have as a Government—on this issue and on a number of others—is that we need to instil confidence in the general population that not only are our objectives sound but the methods that we are about to use will be effective. I want to stick to the Bill, but let me use a general example. There has been a trend in Government over the past 17 months of policies being introduced that have not maintained the confidence of the general public or of a number of Members. Having destroyed that confidence, we have then gone through a process of reversing the policies and, as a result, not gaining any benefit from them. We just require a bit more political nous as we consider things, issue by issue.

In this field in particular, I do not think that we have taken people with us. What has undermined confidence for people like me is that when Members honestly expressed their views, concerns and expertise, and moved amendments, they lost the Whip. Then, at a later date—within weeks—the Government adopted those amendments as part of the process in the Lords.

Matthew Pennycook: No, we did not.

John McDonnell: I am happy to take an intervention if the Minister so wishes.

Matthew Pennycook: I am happy to intervene just to make clear that we did not adopt the amendments that were pressed on Report. There are very crucial differences between the package that we submitted and those amendments.

John McDonnell: The Government did not accept the amendments on Report, but the reality is that they had to negotiate with the other House and introduce amendments that were in the spirit of the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff)—it is as simple as that. We need to be honest about that and admit when we make mistakes.

That is why I worry about this. If we introduce legislation of this sort, we need to take people with us. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South referred, in a derogatory tone, to the well-funded environmental groups. I have been working with those groups for nearly 50 years. I have never seen a breadth of unanimity across them on an issue such as this. Some of them cannot be described as anything other than mainstream. What they are asking for, in some of these amendments, is relatively limited, so it behoves us, as a listening Government, to go that one step further and see whether compromises can be reached. I congratulate the Government on doing that for clause 3, in which compromises have been reached. For some reason, however, people are digging their heels in, particularly in relation to Lords amendment 40.

Let me deal with Lords amendment 1 on national policy statements. As I said earlier, confidence must be built when dealing with huge developments. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) has mentioned the third runway at Heathrow. The proposal to build a third runway will never have my constituents' confidence because, as I said earlier, 15,000 of them will lose their homes, whole villages will be

[John McDonnell]

wiped off the face of the earth, and 2 million more people in London will suffer from noise and air pollution—so we will not be able to convince them, to be honest. However, on more general topics, including major infrastructure projects, the role of Select Committees has been critical, as they are able to examine those issues in depth, have Ministers before them and present reports to the House, which we can debate.

In many instances, Select Committee reports and the work those Committees have done has been of such a quality that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) demonstrated in his description of the work his Select Committee does—they have influenced Government, enabled policies to be changed and, as a result, built up confidence in the general public. I am concerned about any lessening of the role of Select Committees in this whole process. The Minister has given us some assurances, and we will see how that works out in practice, but we interfere with that democratic process of this House at our peril when we are in government, because this is how mistakes get made.

3.30 pm

With regard to the issue of EDPs, I cannot understand why a compromise cannot be made. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan) said very clearly that we are talking about millions of people involved in the organisations that are supporting Lords amendment 40 and asking the Government to think again. There is an argument—and I accept it—that EDPs could be successfully applied to certain issues, but there is also a real scepticism about their use, particularly with regard to individual habitats and species. I do not want to get into dormice, to be honest; we have already had that debate.

I accept that argument, so I ask the Government to think again and see whether, in their discussions with the other House, they could reach a compromise where they accept that the EDP process can operate in relation to those matters set out in the amendment, but before we go any further, there is much more discussion, consultation and maybe research, because some of the research I have seen is quite challenging. We might then be able to move forward, but to try to bash this through now without that element of compromise will undermine what could be a very effective and successful piece of legislation.

I suppose what I am appealing for is just a bit of political nous. Do we have to go through another process where we bash something through, only to realise we have alienated so many people that we have to reverse it, and then people lose confidence in us because of that? I have been involved in so much legislation in this place, and it becomes boring after a bit. I can remember the mad dogs Bill, which went chasing through the House and was regretted within about three months. We are not in that situation here, but if we fail to even consider compromise, we can make bad legislation that we subsequently regret. That is all I am asking for.

If there is ping-pong—which there might well be, since the majorities in the other place were enormous on this amendment—it might give us the breathing space to get that compromise. It would be worth while the Minister bringing together some of the Members who have expressed their concerns, to have another discussion and consultation between the Bill going back

to the other place and returning here. I think something could be hammered out, and as a result of that, maybe we will avoid the mistakes we have seen over the last 17 months that have so damaged my own party and my own Government.

I will leave it at that. Maybe I am lost in appealing for rational and reasonable government, but I will continue to pursue that, as I have for the last three decades.

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): I am pleased to speak today in full support of Lords amendments 38 and 40. I would also like to take the opportunity to press the Minister on the Government's response in the other place to Lords amendment 32, which I will come to shortly.

First, on Lords amendment 40, I am pleased that the Lords altered the uses of environmental delivery plans to better protect species. North Norfolk is proudly biodiverse, and it must be protected. We should all see the shocking decline in our rare swallowtail butterflies—an icon of the Norfolk broads—as an indicator of the nature emergency we face. Protections for wildlife and biodiversity are crucial, and I hope the Government will retain this amendment.

On Lords amendment 38, I welcome the Minister's statement of future intent, but I am nevertheless in full support of protecting North Norfolk's chalk streams. I thank my local bishop, the Bishop of Norwich, for tabling that amendment in the other place and for his admirable support for and defence of chalk streams in Norfolk and across the country. He is a great champion for the environment and I thank him for it. Over the summer I went to Letheringsett in my constituency, with volunteers from the River Glaven Conservation Group. The Glaven is a much loved chalk stream locally, and one of many in North Norfolk that we hold dear. As one local councillor told me, in North Norfolk, "we cherish our chalkies."

I saw the work undertaken to renew and revitalise the river and its floodplain, made as part of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's nine chalk rivers project. A 1.2 km man-made channel was dug to reconnect the river to its original path and restore its natural flow after years of human interference. A new wetland near Glandford ford has also been created, generating a vital new habitat for the native crayfish and water vole that can be found there. I also heard of the challenges, from construction silt run-off to sewage discharges. Allowing a unique and precious natural environment to be treated this way in recent years is nothing short of scandalous.

Sadly, this is the situation not only for the Glaven or even Norfolk's chalk streams; we have heard shameful tales of those historic habitats across the country being trashed and abused by profiteering water companies, without a shred of care for the environment that they are damaging. That is why I believe that Lords amendment 38 is a perfectly sensible and much-needed addition to the Bill. Of course those of us with chalk streams in our local areas want spatial development strategies to take account of them and ensure their ongoing protection. I am yet to hear a convincing argument from the Government as to why this amendment is being so strongly opposed.

Clearly, the status quo is not working, and we cannot embark on a new age of development and infrastructure building without making sure that those aspects of our

environment that are already being failed are not damaged beyond saving. There has been a lot of talk in recent months about national pride and the St George's cross. Well, I am proud that the St George's cross flies over 85% of the world's chalk streams. Out of only 200 in the world, the majority are right here in England. We are the custodians and guardians of the vast majority of this special habitat. We have to take that responsibility seriously, and Lords amendment 38 is an important step towards proving that we will.

I have been critical of much of what is included in the Bill, but almost equal amounts of criticism can be levelled against it because of what it lacks. Today we can plug one more gap in it by agreeing with the Lords in their amendment.

I said that I wanted to press the Minister on Lords amendment 32, which may have been unfortunately worded with a slightly predetermined outcome when it was tabled in the other place. In North Norfolk, we have real issues with water abstraction licences. Food processors and farmers need water, and attenuation is the answer. The current permitted development regulation is clearly not working. The Government responded in the other place by saying that they needed to look at PDRs and would return to them. I wonder if I can press the Minister to indicate a few more steps and some timelines.

Matthew Pennycook *indicated dissent.*

Steff Aquarone: I am getting an indication that he will not do so, which is a shame.

I support the development of more homes in North Norfolk; there are 2,400 households on our housing waiting list who demand that provision. I am delighted that new residents in Walcott and Bacton will be moving into dozens of new affordable homes in the coming months, supported by our Lib Dem-led council. I want everyone living in North Norfolk, though—in new homes or in old—to be able to cherish our ancient chalk streams for the decades and centuries to come, and I urge colleagues across the House to vote to protect them.

Ruth Cadbury: It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone), a fellow Transport Committee member. We do not have any chalk streams running through Brentford and Isleworth, but we are beside the Thames, which I know is fed by many chalk streams.

John McDonnell: You've got a canal.

Ruth Cadbury: We do have a canal. We also have the Thames, the River Crane and the Duke of Northumberland river, but I do not think any of them are chalk. The issues for chalk streams, particularly sewage going into them in Oxfordshire, causes us problems in the Thames as it goes past my constituency—I digress.

I welcome the many changes that the Government will make to the planning system as a result of the Bill, and I welcome the amendments that have been made during its passage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Mike Reader) said so eloquently, the most important thing about the Bill is that will it bring more homes. There is high demand for housing in

the borough of Hounslow; people desperately need adequate, affordable and good-quality housing but cannot get on to the housing ladder. Some people can afford to rent or buy privately, but I know from door-knocking that all the flats that have been built over the past 20 years are fully occupied.

West London is desperately short of housing, for those already living in the area who want to stay close to their family and for those who want to come to live in the area to take advantage of the many job opportunities in growth sectors. Sadly, some developments that have planning permission have not yet been built, partly because of changes to designs following Grenfell, and partly because other building regulation and industry changes. I hope that those developments get on stream very quickly.

I will focus on Lords amendment 1 to clause 2. In response to my intervention on the Minister earlier, he assured me that despite the significant changes and the new national policy statements, the existing process of parliamentary scrutiny—including a role for this Chamber and the Committees—will continue, and I thank him for that.

The new procedure introduced in clause 2 applies to amendments to national policy statements that reflect policy or legislative changes, or decisions that have been through the courts. The implication is that the provision will enable the quicker implementation of light-touch amendments—those involving less material changes—to national policy statements. That concerns some of us, as the Chair of the Liaison Committee has already covered so eloquently. Some of these changes could be very significant, and they deserve proper scrutiny. As Chair of the Transport Committee, I will come later to some examples specifically relating to transport.

The Government's changes will give

“Parliament and the relevant select committee forewarning that Government intends to follow the reflective amendment procedure to update an NPS”.

The “reflective amendment procedure” is what I would call “the reduced procedure”, but we will get forewarning—great. The Government will also have to formally announce a review of an NPS by making a statement in Parliament—great. When there is a partial review, the Government will

“informally update the Liaison Committee and the relevant Select Committee”

by writing to the relevant Select Committee at the commencement of the public consultation period on proposed changes to an NPS.

In Committee, the Minister said that

“Ministers will make themselves available to speak at the relevant Select Committee during the consultation period, so far as is practical.”—[*Official Report, Planning and Infrastructure Public Bill Committee*, 29 April 2025; c. 105.]

It is the words “so far as is practical” that have concerned the Chairs of the Select Committees.

A letter received by the Liaison Committee also stated that if a Select Committee publishes a report on proposed NPS changes within the public consultation period, then the Government will take those views into account before the updated NPS is laid before Parliament and will seek to respond to the report around the time of laying the updated NPS “wherever feasible”.

[Ruth Cadbury]

When the Minister sums up, I hope he will clarify those two phrases: “so far as is practical”, in relation to the Minister coming to the Select Committee; and “wherever feasible”, in terms of the Government responding to the Committee’s report.

As I have just said, the reflective amendment process is expected to apply to changes to national policy statements that reflect legislative decisions, Government decisions, the publication of Government policy or changes to other documents referred to in the ANPS. I have a question, which I would really like to know the answer to: by what criteria will the new process be used, and who decides? When will the full-fat version, with the involvement of Parliament, be used?

3.45 pm

Let me pick up some transport-specific examples; there are probably other examples in the fields of net zero, water and energy. Net zero has made a fundamental change for transport, and the UK’s commitment to net zero by 2050, as incorporated into legislation, has had a significant impact on a whole range of transport infrastructure. That is Government policy, so it is factored into all the last revisions of national policy statements. For instance, the Government policy on net zero, and therefore our legal commitments, have been adopted since the last airports national policy statement.

One could say that the significant capacity increases agreed at airports across the south-east would have a significant impact on any future debate and scrutiny in Parliament of the airports NPS. Let us remember that the airports NPS does not mean all airports; it means only runway three at Heathrow airport. When that NPS comes back through the process of parliamentary Committees, will the significant capacity increases in other airports in the south-east be considered, given the fact that this Parliament has adopted a net-zero policy since then? Will they consider those changes still to be determined under the lesser process or under the existing, full process?

There may be other changes, such as in the national networks strategy, which has also been impacted by net zero. The national networks strategy covers the strategic road network, railways and rail freight interchanges—for example, it governed the development consent order decision for the lower Thames crossing. Funnily enough, the national networks strategy touches on very little rail. Bizarrely, even under the existing process, the TransPennine route upgrade, which is very significant, does not meet the threshold to be a nationally significant infrastructure project, and most rail projects are consented under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

HS2 will definitely have been dealt with via the full-fat process, but what if there are changes to the route of HS2, some major element of an HS2 station and so on? That deserves full scrutiny by representatives in this Chamber. Unless we can have some further reassurances from the Minister, I am concerned that by rejecting Lords amendment 1, this place will in effect have less ability to scrutinise.

Julia Buckley (Shrewsbury) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a really important point about the need to use these planning processes to align our transport infrastructure

plans and ensure that they align with our ambitions around housing developments. Nowhere is the lack of public transport infrastructure more important than in rural constituencies such as mine, where we have my thriving town of Shrewsbury. We have 65,000 residents, but we had no buses after 7 pm or on a Sunday, until now. Thanks to a pilot, we will now have a night bus for the month before Christmas that will run hourly between 8 pm and midnight, giving a boost to our local economy. Does she agree that we must not wait 10 years for such excellent news? We must plan ahead to align both our transport policies and our development plans.

Ruth Cadbury: My hon. Friend is an amazing ambassador for Shrewsbury—I have learned so much about Shrewsbury since getting to know her. Although it is possibly beyond the scope of today’s debate, she is absolutely right about the need to align transport policies and networks with our wider growth and development aspirations. I know that the Government are listening, and are working hard on that very issue. The point about new towns is also a very good one, and it has been welcome to see a Transport Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), sitting alongside the Housing and Planning Minister for quite a lot of this debate—it is a good sign that the important need to break down the silos that built up in Government over the past 15 years is being recognised. We on the Committee corridor really appreciate that.

The Transport Committee considered national networks in 2023, so we do not expect to see that national policy statement again until 2028—we will see what process is followed then, if indeed this change does go through. We published our view on the national policy statement on ports this morning, so it will be 2030 before that is due for revision again. As I said, airports is the only national policy statement that is specific to a particular development, and the Transport Committee expects to address it in the months ahead. Of course, we will be doing so following the Chancellor’s announcement that the Government wish to pursue the development of runway three.

Although we honour the power and role of the Government, I pick up on what the Minister said on Report when he was keen to assure us that the Government’s changes were

“not about eroding parliamentary scrutiny, but about ensuring that scrutiny is proportionate to the changes being made”,

and that the Government

“recognise the value that such scrutiny brings to getting important changes right.”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 757.]

Our constituents want to be assured that any changes that have a disproportionate impact on them will be properly scrutinised by this House. I am glad that the Minister has said that the Government will lay a statement in the House, write to the relevant Select Committee and make themselves available, but I want to pick up on the phrase “as far as is practicable”. It is good that he went on to say that

“the Government recognise the importance of Ministers attending Committee to explain the proposed changes”,

and that

“Parliament retains the ultimate say over whether a change should be enacted”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 757.],

but Parliament needs time, access to Ministers, and assurance that significant changes will be able to be properly and fully scrutinised. Where a proposed change is significant enough—where it is not a relatively minor change—we must be able to use the full process.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Minister to wind up.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to this debate. In opening the debate, I set out at some length the reasons why the Government are resisting the bulk of the amendments made in the other place. In the interests of time, I do not intend to reiterate at any great length the points I have made previously. I will instead focus my remarks on expanding the Government's arguments in key respects, and on addressing any points raised in the debate that I did not cover in my opening remarks.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way, especially so early in his remarks. I apologise to him and to the House for not being here for his opening remarks, which he has just mentioned. In them, he talked a little about Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords amendment 31. I am grateful to him for the concession that the Government are making and for the moves they intend to make. However, can I make just two criticisms of Government amendments (a) and (b)? The first is very minor; Government amendment (a) refers to the

“Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2028”.

That should, of course, be 2018. I know that the Minister will be able to correct that error in due course.

The more substantive criticism is about data collection. The Minister will know that is the only substantive difference left between the Government's proposal and the one that I made on Report in this place and that Lord Borwick made in the other place. When we seek to improve access for people with disabilities to charging infrastructure, we should be able to keep track of progress. If the Minister is not minded to do that in the context of this Bill, will he consider other ways in which we can be sure that progress is being made in the direction that he and I both want to see?

Matthew Pennycook: I will of course pick up the drafting error that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has identified and rectify that. I am more than happy to take the data point away and reflect further. With the amendment in lieu that we have proposed, there is obviously a process around the regulations that come forward with further opportunities to feed in. I very much appreciate his recognition that the amendment in lieu goes a long way to addressing the points that he raised.

I will pick up a number of the points that have been raised in the course of the debate, starting with those relating to Lords amendment 1. For the purposes of clarity, I will lay out again the reassurances I have given to the House, both on Report and today. Where the Government of the day intend to make a reflective amendment to a national policy statement, a statement will be laid in Parliament announcing a review and the relevant Select Committee will be written to. Ministers

will make themselves available to speak at that Committee. On Report, I talked about that being wherever practicable to account for the usual scheduling challenges that all Ministers face, but I hope it is noted that I withdrew those comments. We expect Ministers to make themselves available to the relevant Committee in all instances, and we will take into account the views of any Select Committee report published during the consultation period.

Importantly, the NPS as amended must be laid in Parliament for 21 days. That is 21 sitting days, during which time this House may resolve that the amendment should not be proceeded with. Parliament retains the ultimate say over whether a change proposed through the reflective route should be enacted.

On who makes the decisions, it is the relevant Secretary of State who will decide whether a change falls into one of the four categories, but the categories are closely defined. They include: relevant published Government policy, a change to legislation and a decision of the court. The intent of the relevant clause is not to evade parliamentary scrutiny, but to address the fact that, on average, the Select Committee inquiry process adds around five months to the process of updating a national policy statement. That is as things stand. We want to ensure that Select Committees are engaged and that we have regular and timely updates. I can happily confirm, as I have made clear, that where a Select Committee returns recommendations during that consultation period, they will be taken into account. However, we need this change to make reflective amendments to the NPS to ensure that things can be kept up to date.

Airports are a good example of where a full NPS review would have to take place. That would not be allowed to take place through the reflective amendment process, and that is not the intention of the Secretary of State for Transport. In those circumstances, the Secretary of State must lay the proposed amended national policy statement in full before Parliament and specify a relevant period. If within that relevant period, either House passes a resolution or a Committee makes recommendations on the proposed amendment, the Secretary of State must respond, and that response must be laid before Parliament. There are two different processes.

Turning to chalk streams, we have to be clear about the intent of Lords amendment 38. It is not a broad blanket statutory protection for chalk streams; it implies specific requirements on chalk streams in spatial development strategies brought forward by the relevant authorities. We think there are important practical reasons why those authorities are not the relevant bodies to bring such protections forward.

In his contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy) referenced a number of cases where other legislation or other Government agencies are ultimately responsible for addressing some of the problems in question, not the spatial authorities that will bring forward SDSs. We therefore do not think that Lords amendment 38 is the right way to proceed. National policy is the way to proceed in the Government's view. While I accept that chalk streams are not currently mentioned explicitly in national policy, the NPPF is clear that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value, and local plans should:

“Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks”.

[Matthew Pennycook]

In addition, when determining planning applications local planning authorities should apply the principle that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or, in the last resort, compensated for, planning permission should be refused. The application of these protections extends beyond strategic plans, to all types of plan and, crucially, to decisions on planning applications. As I said, the Government acknowledge the case for giving explicit recognition to chalk streams in national planning policy, although I cannot go further than the commitment I gave at the Dispatch Box today that we will lay out and consult on proposals to include that explicit recognition and in so doing make clear, unambiguously, our expectations for how plan makers and decision makers should treat chalk streams. That will be part of the consultation.

4 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The Minister knows that, across this House and the other place, there is wide recognition of how unique and precious our chalk streams are. He clearly recognises that, as well. Given their importance and the fact that most of them are in the UK, why have the Government not yet brought forward an amendment to reflect the cross-party concerns expressed in both Houses? I know him to be a serious and sincere man, but the Minister is, in effect, asking the House to rely on his good will to do something at some point, and we have no idea what it is.

Matthew Pennycook: I think that is a slightly unfair précis of what I said. I take very seriously the commitments I make from this Dispatch Box. I have committed, in a consultation that will take place before the end of this year, to include in proposed changes to national planning policy explicit recognition of chalk streams and how they will be treated. The full details will be open to consultation. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman. We could have a much wider debate about policy versus statute, but we think that in the planning system there are very good reasons to put things in policy, where they can be amended or updated if necessary, rather than in statute. Chalk streams are a good example of where that argument applies.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk made a compelling case for many of the things we are doing outside planning policy to safeguard chalk streams. There are mechanisms to deliver chalk stream conservation, including through our plans to reform the water industry, under which water companies plan to spend more than £2 billion over the next five years to develop targeted actions on chalk streams; through biodiversity net gain, which requires like-for-like compensation or enhancement where development impacts on these areas; and through the system we intend to introduce of environmental outcomes reports, which specifically reference these bodies of water.

Kit Malthouse: I understand the undertaking the Minister is giving, but he will recognise that all of this is guidance; it does not preclude planning decisions that will impact on chalk streams. Given that he is set on his course, which we understand, and his appreciation of the fact that the amendment was proposed in the spirit of addressing the lack of any other sort of protection

for chalk streams, will he reassure us that the intention in the planning guidance is to give chalk streams the same sort of protection as was put in place for, for example, veteran trees, which are deemed to be irreplaceable? That is the highest level of protection in planning guidance—I think I introduced this as Planning Minister. In that way, only in very exceptional circumstances could permission be granted for development that would impinge on chalk streams.

Matthew Pennycook: I cannot go beyond what I set out earlier. We will put the proposals out to full consultation before the end of the year. I will address the subject of irreplaceable habitats in this winding-up speech.

In his speech, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned a number of other issues, including the absorption constraint dilemma, viability, housing delivery targets and local plans. Perhaps we should sit down outside the Chamber and have a coffee, as I think I would benefit from his insights, but I shall certainly give further thought to the many points he made.

On neighbourhood plans, they are not referenced in the Bill, other than in relation to an amendment we made specifically in connection with Ramsar sites. Again, I am more than happy to have a wider conversation with him about this Government's view of the place of neighbourhood plans in the planning system.

On irreplaceable habitats, the national planning policy framework makes it clear that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of such habitats should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists. Those protections continue to apply; nothing in the Bill bypasses them. Fundamentally, an EDP that would lead to irreversible harm to or the loss of an irreplaceable environmental feature could not be approved by a Secretary of State, as this would fail to secure overall improvement of the conservation status of the relevant feature.

I want to briefly mention the mitigation hierarchy, which was raised by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos). Natural England will always consider the mitigation hierarchy when it develops an EDP. That is an important approach when planning for biodiversity, as it is generally more environmentally effective and cost efficient to protect what is already there than to replace it. The requirements for the environmental principles policy statement include the prevention and rectification-at-source principles, which are key to the mitigation hierarchy. The Secretary of State must have due regard to the EPPS when making policy, and will therefore do so when making an EDP. We recognise, however, that we need to provide further reassurance. On Third Reading in the other place, as the hon. Gentleman referenced, we amended the Bill to allow the Government to bring forward regulations setting out how EDPs would prioritise addressing the negative effect of development, providing greater clarity about how the principles of the existing mitigation hierarchy are expressed through the new system.

I will briefly touch on two further issues. On Lords amendment 40, as I said, we do not believe there is any compelling case for limiting the application of EDPs just to the issues that are covered by the amendment: nutrient neutrality, water quality, water resource or air quality. I think the challenge made by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for

Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan), was that applying EDPs to species will somehow cause harm. That is not the case.

Limiting the environmental impacts that can be covered is unnecessary because the overall improvement test that I have mentioned ensures that an EDP can be made only where it will have an overall positive impact on the environmental feature. I mentioned district-level licensing of great crested newts, which is an example of where a strategic approach can lead to better outcomes for nature, and that is the approach we are taking forward in this Bill.

Lastly, I must reference the constituency issue raised by the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) regarding the Eskdalemuir seismic array. We recognise the interference that onshore wind turbines can cause to seismological monitoring stations and the subsequent safeguarding concerns that operators of seismological arrays can have. We are working closely with the Ministry of Defence to bring forward a resolution to this issue via the working group, which I know he is aware of. We are clear that the array is a key piece of defence infrastructure that is part of international monitoring networks, and that any updated approach to managing onshore wind deployment near the array will not compromise its detection capabilities.

Under a new proposed approach, the Ministry of Defence needs onshore wind proposals to submit specific information and comply with the seismic impact limit, and for determining authorities—the decision makers—to be bound not to approve applications if those limits are breached. I hope that provides the right hon. Gentleman with some further reassurance, but, again, I am more than happy to engage with him further.

To conclude, this Government were elected on a promise of change, and we are determined to deliver it. Through the measures introduced by this landmark Bill, we will get Britain building again, unleash economic growth and deliver on the promise of national renewal. Let me bring the House back to what is at the heart of this Bill: we need new homes and we need new critical infrastructure. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Mike Reader) made that point compellingly. The need for those across the country is pressing. This Bill needs to receive Royal Assent as soon as possible.

To that end, we have shown ourselves more than willing to make sensible changes to the Bill in response to compelling arguments, but we are not prepared to accept amendments that undermine its core principles. I look forward to continuing constructive conversations with peers, alongside Baroness Taylor, to secure agreement across both Houses in the near future. I commend the Government's position to the House.

Question put. That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 135.

Division No. 347]

[4.8 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Al-Hassan, Sadik
Akehurst, Luke	Ali, Rushanara
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Ali, Tahir
Aldridge, Dan	Anderson, Callum
Alexander, rh Heidi	Anderson, Fleur

Asato, Jess	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Asser, James	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Atkinson, Catherine	Farnsworth, Linsey
Atkinson, Lewis	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Ferguson, Patricia
Bailey, Olivia	Fleet, Natalie
Baker, Alex	Fookes, Catherine
Baker, Richard	Francis, Daniel
Ballinger, Alex	Furniss, Gill
Barker, Paula	Gardner, Dr Allison
Barron, Lee	Gemmell, Alan
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Gilbert, Tracy
Baxter, Johanna	Gill, Preet Kaur
Beavers, Lorraine	Gittins, Becky (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)
Bell, Torsten	Glindon, Mary
Benn, rh Hilary	Goldsborough, Ben
Betts, Mr Clive	Gould, Georgia
Billington, Ms Polly	Grady, John
Blake, Rachel	Griffith, Dame Nia
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Gwynne, Andrew (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)
Bonavia, Kevin	Hack, Amanda
Botterill, Jade	Hall, Sarah
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Hamilton, Fabian
Brickell, Phil	Hamilton, Paulette
Bryant, Chris	Harris, Carolyn
Buckley, Julia	Hayes, Helen
Burton-Sampson, David	Hayes, Tom
Byrne, Ian	Hazelgrove, Claire
Byrne, rh Liam	Hendrick, Sir Mark (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)
Cadbury, Ruth	Hinder, Jonathan
Caliskan, Nesil	Hopkins, Rachel
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Hughes, Claire (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)
Campbell, Juliet	Hume, Alison
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Hurley, Patrick
Carling, Sam	Hussain, Imran
Charalambous, Bambos	Ingham, Leigh
Clark, Feryal	Jameson, Sally
Collinge, Lizzi	Jarvis, Dan
Collins, Tom	Jermy, Terry
Conlon, Liam	Jones, Gerald
Cooper, Andrew	Jones, Ruth
Costigan, Deirdre	Josan, Gurinder Singh
Cox, Pam	Kane, Mike
Coyle, Neil	Kaur, Satvir (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)
Craft, Jen	Khan, Afzal
Creagh, Mary	Kitchen, Gen
Creasy, Ms Stella	Kumar, Sonia
Crichton, Torcuil	Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Curtis, Chris	Lamb, Peter
Daby, Janet	Lavery, Ian
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Law, Noah
Darlington, Emily	Lewell, Emma
Davies, Paul	Lewin, Andrew
Davies, Shaun	Lightwood, Simon
De Cordova, Marsha	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Dean, Josh	Macdonald, Alice
Dearden, Kate	MacNae, Andy
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Malhotra, Seema
Dickson, Jim	Martin, Amanda
Dixon, Anna	Maskell, Rachael
Dixon, Samantha	Mayer, Alex
Dowd, Peter	McAllister, Douglas
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	McCarthy, Kerry
Eagle, Dame Angela	McDonald, Andy
Eccles, Cat	McDonnell, rh John
Edwards, Lauren	
Efford, Clive	
Elmore, Chris	
Eshalomi, Florence	
Evans, Chris	

McDougall, Blair
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom

Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Ferguson and
Taiwo Owatemi

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew

Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John

Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Fortune, Peter
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome

Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Sarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin

Tellers for the Noes:
Harriet Cross and
Sir Ashley Fox

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 1 disagreed to.

After Clause 2

PROJECTS RELATING TO WATER

Amendment (a) proposed to Lords amendment 2.
 —(Matthew Pennycook.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 125.

Division No. 348]

[4.22 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Apsana Begum*)
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Cooper, Andrew
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry

Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shannon, Jim
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Mark Ferguson

NOES

Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Fortune, Peter
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Green, Sarah
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian

Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
Harriet Cross and
Sir Ashley Fox

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 2.

Lords amendment 2, as amended, agreed to.

After Clause 2

PROJECTS RELATING TO WATER WHICH REQUIRE THE
 DEMOLITION OF VILLAGES

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3.—(Matthew Pennycook.)

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 128.

Division No. 349]

[4.34 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil

Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Eford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Lindsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh

Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtissam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard

Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Mark Ferguson

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
 Harriet Cross and
 Sir Ashley Fox

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 3 disagreed to.

Lords amendment 31 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) made in lieu of Lords amendment 31.

After Clause 47

DEREGULATION OF LOW HAZARD RESERVOIRS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 32.—(Matthew Pennycook.)

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 78.

Division No. 350]

[4.46 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Apsana Begum*)
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia

Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris

Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Mark Ferguson

NOES

Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bowie, Andrew
 Burghart, Alex
 Cartlidge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast*
by Mr Mohindra)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John

Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast*
by Mr Mohindra)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Mohindra)
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Rebecca Paul and
Jerome Mayhew

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 32 disagreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. In an earlier Division, six Members behaved in the most disorderly fashion and pushed themselves past Doorkeepers. Those six Members have been identified, and I expect them to come and apologise to me before the evening is out, and to the Doorkeepers to whom they behaved in the most disrespectful way.

Clause 51

DELEGATION OF PLANNING DECISIONS IN ENGLAND
Motion made, and Question put, That this House
disagrees with Lords amendment 33.—(Matthew Pennycook.)

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 128.

Division No. 351]

[4.57 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote*
cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)
 Glendon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote*
cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy*
vote cast by Sir Nicholas
Dakin)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote*
cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan

Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve

Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Mark Ferguson and
 Taiwo Owatemi

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Choje, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Lam, Katie

Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
 Rebecca Paul and
 Jerome Mayhew

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 33 disagreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. The Members who caused the earlier fracas have apologised to the Chair and the Doorkeepers, so that case is closed for now.

5.2 pm

More than four hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords amendments, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme motion, this day).

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

After Clause 51

DEREGULATION OF LOW HAZARD RESERVOIRS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 37.—(Matthew Pennycook.)

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 129.

Division No. 352]

[5.8 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Carling, Sam
Akehurst, Luke	Charalambous, Bambos
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Clark, Feryal
Aldridge, Dan	Collinge, Lizzi
Alexander, rh Heidi	Collins, Tom
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Conlon, Liam
Ali, Rushanara	Cooper, Andrew
Ali, Tahir	Cooper, rh Yvette
Anderson, Callum	Costigan, Deirdre
Anderson, Fleur	Cox, Pam
Asser, James	Coyle, Neil
Atkinson, Catherine	Craft, Jen
Atkinson, Lewis	Creagh, Mary
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Creasy, Ms Stella
Bailey, Olivia	Crichton, Torcuil
Baker, Alex	Curtis, Chris
Baker, Richard	Daby, Janet
Ballinger, Alex	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Barker, Paula	Darlington, Emily
Barron, Lee	Davies, Paul
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Davies, Shaun
Baxter, Johanna	Dean, Josh
Beales, Danny	Dearden, Kate
Beavers, Lorraine	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Bell, Torsten	Dickson, Jim
Benn, rh Hilary	Dixon, Anna
Betts, Mr Clive	Dixon, Samantha
Billington, Ms Polly	Dowd, Peter
Blake, Rachel	Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Eagle, Dame Angela
Bonavia, Kevin	Eccles, Cat
Botterill, Jade	Edwards, Lauren
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Efford, Clive
Brickell, Phil	Elmore, Chris
Bryant, Chris	Eshalomi, Florence
Buckley, Julia	Evans, Chris
Burton-Sampson, David	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Byrne, Ian	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Cadbury, Ruth	Farnsworth, Linsey
Caliskan, Nesil	Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Ferguson, Mark
Campbell, Juliet	Ferguson, Patricia
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Fleet, Natalie

Fookes, Catherine	McNally, Frank
Francis, Daniel	Midgley, Anneliese
Furniss, Gill	Minns, Ms Julie
Gardiner, Barry	Mohamed, Abtissam
Gardner, Dr Allison	Moon, Perran
Gemmell, Alan	Morden, Jessica
Gilbert, Tracy	Morris, Grahame
Gill, Preet Kaur	Morris, Joe
Gittins, Becky (<i>Proxy vote</i>	Mullane, Margaret
<i>cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)</i>	Murray, Chris
Glindon, Mary	Murray, rh Ian
Goldsborough, Ben	Murray, rh James
Gould, Georgia	Naish, James
Grady, John	Narayan, Kanishka
Griffith, Dame Nia	Nash, Pamela
Gwynne, Andrew (<i>Proxy vote</i>	Nichols, Charlotte
<i>cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)</i>	Norris, Alex
Hack, Amanda	Norris, Dan (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>
Hall, Sarah	<i>by Sir Nicholas Dakin)</i>
Hamilton, Fabian	Opher, Dr Simon
Hamilton, Paulette	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
Harris, Carolyn	Osborne, Tristan
Hayes, Helen	Owatemi, Taiwo
Hayes, Tom	Pakes, Andrew
Hendrick, Sir Mark (<i>Proxy</i>	Payne, Michael
<i>vote cast by Sir Nicholas</i>	Peacock, Stephanie
<i>Dakin)</i>	Pearce, Jon
Hillier, Dame Meg	Pennycook, Matthew
Hinder, Jonathan	Perkins, Mr Toby
Hopkins, Rachel	Pitcher, Lee
Hughes, Claire (<i>Proxy vote</i>	Platt, Jo
<i>cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin)</i>	Powell, Joe
Hume, Alison	Prinsley, Peter
Hurley, Patrick	Quigley, Mr Richard
Hussain, Imran	Qureshi, Yasmin
Ingham, Leigh	Race, Steve
Jameson, Sally	Rand, Mr Connor
Jarvis, Dan	Rayner, rh Angela
Jermy, Terry	Reader, Mike
Jones, Gerald	Reed, rh Steve
Jones, Ruth	Reeves, rh Ellie
Josan, Gurinder Singh	Reid, Joani
Kane, Mike	Reynolds, rh Emma
Kaur, Satvir (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>	Reynolds, rh Jonathan
<i>by Sir Nicholas Dakin)</i>	Rhodes, Martin
Khan, Afzal	Richards, Jake
Kitchen, Gen	Robertson, Dave
Kumar, Sonia	Rodda, Matt
Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Rushworth, Sam
Lamb, Peter	Russell, Sarah
Lavery, Ian	Rutland, Tom
Law, Noah	Sackman, Sarah
Lewell, Emma	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Lewin, Andrew	Sandher-Jones, Louise
Lightwood, Simon	Shah, Naz
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Shanker, Baggy
Macdonald, Alice	Siddiq, Tulip
MacNae, Andy	Simons, Josh
Malhotra, Seema	Slaughter, Andy
Martin, Amanda	Slinger, John
Maskell, Rachael	Smith, Jeff
Mayer, Alex	Smith, Nick
McAllister, Douglas	Stainbank, Euan
McCarthy, Kerry	Stewart, Elaine
McDonald, Andy	Stone, Will
McDonnell, rh John	Strathern, Alistair
McDougall, Blair	Strickland, Alan
McFadden, rh Pat	Sullivan, Kirsteen
McKee, Gordon	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
McKenna, Kevin	Swallow, Peter
McKinnell, Catherine	Tami, rh Sir Mark
McMahon, Jim	Tapp, Mike

Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris

Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Mark Ferguson

Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard

Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
 Rebecca Paul and
 Jerome Mayhew

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinéage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew

Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast
 by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 37 disagreed to.

Clause 52

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

*Motion made, and Question put, That this House
 disagrees with Lords amendment 38.—(Matthew Pennycook.)*

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 130.

Division No. 353]

[5.19 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet

Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh

Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine

McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark

Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris

Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Stephen Morgan and
Gregor Poynton

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Choje, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian

Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Ashley Fox and
Harriet Cross

Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)

Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)

Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)

Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca

Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran

Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simmons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 38 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 39.—(Matthew Pennycook.)

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 133.

Division No. 354]

[5.30 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus

Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Eford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie

Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul

West, Catherine
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Gregor Poynton

Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom

Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
 Harriet Cross and
 Sir Ashley Fox

NOES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison

Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast
 by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 39 disagreed to.

Clause 55

ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS
 AND CONSERVATION MEASURES

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House
 disagrees with Lords amendment 40.—(Matthew Pennycook.)*

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 132.

Division No. 355]

[5.41 pm

AYES

Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asser, James
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Rachel
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Eford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie

Fookes, Catherine
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Law, Noah
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDougall, Blair
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran

Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pakes, Andrew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie

Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Ward, Chris
 Waugh, Paul
 West, Catherine
 Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison

Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Gregor Poynton

NOES

Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian

Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Matt

Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
Rebecca Paul and
Sir Ashley Fox

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 40 disagreed to.

Lords amendments 4 to 30, 34 to 36, and 41 to 117 agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 1, 3, 32, 33, and 37 to 40.

That Matthew Pennycook, Deirdre Costigan, Harpreet Uppal, Sean Woodcock, Kevin McKenna, David Simmonds and Gideon Amos be members of the Committee.

That Matthew Pennycook be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
 (*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Business Without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With the leave of the House, I will put motions 3 to 5 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Immigration Skills Charge (Amendment) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 15 October, be approved.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

That the draft Infrastructure Planning (Business or Commercial Projects) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 15 October, be approved.

CONTRACTS

That the draft Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (Permitted Disclosures) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 16 October, be approved.—(*Gregor Poynton.*)

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will bundle together motions 6 to 10.

Ordered,

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

That Jess Brown-Fuller be discharged from the Backbench Business Committee and Mr Lee Dillon be added.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

That Zöe Franklin be discharged from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Cameron Thomas be added.

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

That Josh Babarinde be discharged from the Justice Committee and Vikki Slade be added.

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Dr Al Pinkerton be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Mr Paul Kohler be added.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

That Tom Gordon be discharged from the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee and Freddie van Mierlo be added.—
 (*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Northern Ireland Troubles Legacy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Gregor Poynton.*)

5.53 pm

David Davis (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): I start by welcoming the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to his place. We all know that Secretaries of State do not have to answer Adjournment debates. He and I will, of course, have robust differences of view on this, but no one can gainsay either his courtesy or his commitment to the task and so I thank him for being here.

In the coming weeks, we will be asked to consider legislation addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland. We must approach that with the real facts of what happened in Northern Ireland, not the misinformation peddled by the IRA and their sympathisers. We should also remember that the state has a moral obligation to protect brave soldiers who defended our freedoms in the most testing circumstances.

This is not simply a question of policy detail, but a question of principles: the principle that we do not abandon those who acted under our lawful instruction; the principle that we do not risk weakening the effectiveness of our armed forces; and the principle that we do not bend to the demands of terrorists or, indeed, their modern sympathisers. I am afraid that the Government's proposed legislation does little to show any willingness to defend those principles, to which I will return shortly.

In the Westminster Hall debate in July, we heard Labour MPs—Government-supporting MPs—argue:

“The only thing that grants immunity to former members of the IRA is the Northern Ireland legacy Act as it stands.”—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2025; Vol. 771, c. 7WH.]

That is, the Conservative Government's Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023. That is plain wrong. The truth is that there has long been a de facto amnesty for crimes committed during the troubles.

Blair's Government created the Good Friday agreement. It is an agreement that, for the purpose of achieving peace—a good aim—drew a line under the atrocities that had been committed without resolving the complex issues of accountability. The Good Friday agreement contained a provision for early release of convicted prisoners. Four hundred and eighty-three terrorists were released from prison early—effectively pardoned—of which 143 had been sentenced to serve life sentences, and they inevitably included many killers. At least 16 terrorists were granted the royal prerogative of mercy—also effectively a pardon. They included hardened terrorists, guilty of extreme violence, such as Gerry Kelly, convicted for the Old Bailey bombings, which killed one person and injured over 200; the three IRA terrorists who murdered SAS Captain Herbert Westmacott; and Fergal Toal, who held down his victim's arms while two of the victim's fingers were hacked off with a hammer and chisel. They all received the royal prerogative of mercy.

It was also the Blair Government who authorised the so-called on-the-run administrative scheme—that is its formal title—and the letters of comfort that accompanied it. It was a secret scheme that only came to light properly in 2014, years after terrorists had received their letters. It was kept secret precisely because it was so spectacularly controversial, and was done in response to Gerry Adams saying, “it would be better if there was

an invisible process for dealing with OTRs.” The name speaks for itself: those people were on the run from the law.

It was an administrative scheme precisely because attempts to legislate for it were dropped when Sinn Féin opposed them on the grounds that it would have protected soldiers too. Those were their explicit grounds. Of course, there was no risk for them in opposing it; they already had their letters, they already had their de facto immunity. The Government are coy about the exact numbers, but at least 156 people received an individual letter of comfort and many others were listed in Government communications as “not wanted” by the authorities.

Again, we are talking about vicious murderers. Ninety-five of those in receipt of letters of comfort were involved in 295 murder investigations—295 murders. The letters were clear. I quote from the first letter of comfort issued:

“You would not...face prosecution for any such offence should you return to the United Kingdom.”

Those were letters given to murderers.

The Government will, of course, retreat to the refuge of legal technicality. They will tell us that these letters were not, strictly speaking, an amnesty, as they left open the possibility of charges for crimes not yet discovered—as does any amnesty. The Government are hiding behind legalistic language. These letters absolutely did stop prosecutions for terrorist atrocities.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): John Downey.

David Davis: My right hon. Friend on the Front Bench mentions the name John Downey. In 2014, John Downey faced prosecution for the Hyde Park bombing. He produced his letter of comfort and his trial collapsed. What the judge said at the trial is important.

He stated there is a

“public interest in holding officials of the state to promises they have made in full understanding of what is involved in the bargain.”

He could not be clearer. He concludes that

“it offends the court's sense of justice and propriety to be asked to try the defendant.”

It should not have even been brought to trial. In other words, the judge was recognising a de facto amnesty. It was only at the collapse of Downey's trial that the existence of the administrative scheme became public knowledge.

The Secretary of State will respond with great charm and say, “Ah, but Mr Downey is now facing prosecution.” That is what he will say.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn): He is.

David Davis: I am right—one of my predictions has come right any way. But that prosecution is for alleged involvement in the murder of two Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers in 1972, not his involvement in the Hyde Park bombing, in which he was ruled, by the way, to have been an “active participant” in a civil case, so we know that background. For those 1972 murders, it has been six years since charges were brought, and little or no progress has been made since then.

The Government—quite properly—make much of the rights of victims, as do I. That has been part of my life in Parliament. But what of the rights of Squadron Quartermaster Corporal Roy Bright, Lieutenant Dennis Daly, Trooper Simon Tipper and Lance Corporal Jeffrey Young? All were killed in the Hyde Park bombing. All had their rights explicitly destroyed.

Let us be frank about the collective effect of those Blair-era concessions: 483 terrorists released from prison early, at least 16 granted mercy—granted effective pardons—and at least 156 letters of comfort. Taken together, that is at least 655 people given some form of legal or administrative protection. I say again that it is “at least” 655 because, frankly, successive Governments have been deliberately obtuse in how they publish those numbers. I suspect the number is significantly higher, but 655 is what we know.

Yet one of the primary defences of the Government’s new legislation put up by Government MPs in that Westminster Hall debate was that the “only thing” granting immunity to former members of the IRA is the previous Government’s Northern Ireland legacy Act. It is just ridiculous. Terrorists killed over 3,000 people during the troubles. As far as the House of Commons Library can establish, there were no convictions for troubles-era violent offences after the Good Friday agreement during the entire period of the Blair Government. That is what they tell me—none. I could not find any either.

The vast majority of those 3,000 troubles-era killings remain unresolved, with no one having faced justice. Since those so-called “non-amnesties”, very few people have been convicted. Again, the Secretary of State said in the Westminster Hall debate that five convictions have been obtained for terrorist-related offences connected to the troubles since 2012—presumably under the Conservative or coalition Governments of that time. He did not name the cases, and I would like to see the details of those cases published so we can actually understand what has happened here. Are these dissident republicans? Are they loyalists? What are they? That is just so we know what has actually happened here. In any case, there have been five convictions for 3,000 killings, and the Government are trying to maintain that there is no amnesty—really?

To ensure that no prosecutions could effectively be brought against the IRA, the Blair Government also agreed during the Good Friday agreement that none of the decommissioned IRA weapons could ever be used as forensic evidence in any future trial. Of course, there are not many witnesses in a trial about Northern Ireland terrorism—that is a fast way to the grave—so forensic evidence is critical, and it was all ruled out of order.

For those few successful convictions since 1998 that the Secretary of State referred to, what is their punishment? It is limited to two years because of the Blair-era Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998—two years for mass murder? Instead of seeing terrorists face justice, we see veterans being hauled before inquests decades after the fact.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I take this opportunity to point out something that the Defence Committee discovered in its investigation of these matters in 2016 to 2017? The maximum of two years actually spent in jail, no matter how horrendous or multiple the murders, also applies to British service personnel. The

argument is put forward that victims wish to see justice attributed and punishment given out, but everybody involved in the killings receives a disproportionately light sentence, so there is no justice of a retributive sort in any case.

David Davis: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. I had forgotten about that report, but I did see it when the Committee published it under his chairmanship.

Instead of seeing terrorists facing justice, we see veterans being hauled before inquests, decades after the fact. That is a problem in part because inquests in Northern Ireland differ in two critical respects from those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The first difference arises from a deliberate decision taken by the Blair Government. Article 3 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 changed the definition of “victim”. It ruled anyone affected by the troubles—through loss, trauma, or injury—would be classed as a victim. That means that a proven murderer killed in an attempt to carry out another murder is still classified as a victim. I know of nowhere else in the world where the law treats killers as victims.

That is still relevant. In September, the Democratic Unionist party—sadly none of its Members are present—used a motion in the Northern Ireland Assembly to try to restore some moral clarity by adding the word “innocent” before “victims”. What did Sinn Féin do? It opposed the motion and removed the word “innocent” from before “victims”. Why? Because the word “innocent” exposes the truth; it draws a line between terrorists and their victims. “Veterans” and “victims” are not mutually exclusive terms; “terrorists” and “victims” are.

Let us understand who these so-called victims are. At Loughgall—the greatest single defeat of the IRA by the SAS—eight heavily armed IRA murderers were stopped on their way to kill again. They and their weapons were implicated in at least 40 previous murders—and possibly more than 200, but it is very hard to pin that number down. Yet because of the Government’s proposals, and the Secretary of State’s promise to the sister of one of those IRA murderers, the soldiers who stopped them face being hauled before the courts, 30 years on, over an operation that prevented further bloodshed of innocent Northern Ireland citizens. The 2006 Order means that those dead terrorists are deemed to be victims.

And what do veterans face? A one-sided inquest, weaponised by Sinn Féin in its attempt to rewrite history. Veterans—many of whom are in their advancing years—are dragged to the witness box. They are made to sit opposite the families of IRA killers—men who died while attempting to maim and kill the innocent. The atmosphere is not one of an impartial inquiry.

I have spoken to a number of veterans, including one in particular who voluntarily attended the Coagh inquest to give evidence. He could not answer some factual questions—he did not know the answers—so the coroner put to him a hypothetical question to get him to answer a hypothetical version of the truth. The veteran declined, quite reasonably, to answer hypotheticals—that was not why he was there. In response, the coroner got “very cross”—the veteran’s words—raised his voice and threatened the veteran with contempt of court. The man was, at that point, a voluntary witness—not any more. He was so disgusted by the process that he will now only give evidence under subpoena; he will not volunteer again.

[David Davis]

In mainland Britain, inquests exist to establish the facts, and at the first suspicion of unlawful killing, they are required to stop and pass the evidence to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In Northern Ireland, inquests have all too often sought to assign blame—all funded by a legal aid machine putting huge unjustified costs on the taxpayer. Just last month, a judicial review against a soldier who shot one of the terrorists at Coagh was robustly dismissed by the judge, who noted the

“ludicrous nature of this challenge, funded as it is by legal aid.”

I have never heard a judge be so critical of the award of legal aid, but plainly he thought this was ridiculous—ludicrous, in his words.

Under the Government’s new legacy proposals, our veterans will remain subjects of suspicion and victims of this vexatious lawfare machine.

Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) (Reform): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the coroner’s court exists to appease the republicans and that all applications should go through the legacy commission?

David Davis: I agree with the hon. Lady’s conclusion, and I happen to agree, as I will come back to in a moment, with the republicans’ view of the coroner’s inquiry process.

It comes back to the issue that my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) raised as to what the punishment was. For a decent, ordinary, law-abiding soldier, the punishment is in the process—being dragged back, having this hanging over them for decades, the uncertainty they face, the sleepless nights and the stress it brings to them and their wives and children, who are worried in their own right and worried about their husband or father. That, I am afraid, is what the IRA and their sympathisers want. It is one of the reasons the IRA consider the very fact of Loughall being referred to an inquest as a victory. They see that as a victory—that and the fact that it allows them another chance to rewrite history, to fit their own bogus claims.

That is why, in a letter on Remembrance Day that has been repeated in this Chamber a number of times, nine four-star generals wrote:

“By extending the same protections to those who enforced the law and those who defied it, the bill becomes morally incoherent. It treats those who upheld the peace and those who bombed and murdered...as equivalent actors in a shared tragedy.”

They go on to highlight the immediate effect, because we must bear in mind that this is having an effect right now on our serving armed forces. They said:

“highly trained members of special forces are already leaving the service. These are the men and women who quietly neutralise threats and protect lives every week. Their loss is significant; it is a direct consequence of legal uncertainty and the erosion of trust.”

I can attest to the fact that that is true. These are the reasons that our veterans hate this new legislation and view it as grotesquely unfair.

It also raises the question of who the Government are trying to appease. When the Government announced the policy, it was done not in this House—I think it was on a Friday—but in a joint statement alongside the Irish Tánaiste. The Irish Government are being treated as an independent party to these troubles and brought

into the reformed legacy commission established by the new Bill as a party that is assumed to be acting in good faith. Well, I am afraid that is not true. There is overwhelming evidence showing the Republic providing sanctuary to IRA terrorists during the troubles. As the Kingsmill—a terrible tragedy—inquest confirmed, terrorists exploited the porous border ruthlessly. The IRA committed acts of terror in the north and used the Republic as their shield—a base for planning, training, storing weapons and, of course, sanctuary; violence in the north, sanctuary in the south.

Consider the brutal murder of Corporal James Elliott in 1972. IRA members abducted him at the border, dragged him into the Republic, tortured him for two days—two days—and shot him dead. They sent his body back across the border, booby-trapped with 500 lb of explosives and six claymores. What did the authorities in the Republic do? They charged two individuals not with murder, but with possessing explosives.

When SAS Captain Herbert Westmacott was murdered, the killers escaped jail before they could be sentenced. Where did they flee? Straight across the border, aided by their comrades. If hon. Members need a third example, they should look at the Omagh bombing, which was carried out after the Good Friday agreement had been signed. That bombing, which injured more than 200 people and tragically killed 29 innocent civilians, one of whom was pregnant with twins, was both planned and launched from the Republic. Despite this, and notwithstanding the call from a Belfast High Court judge for an investigation on both sides of the border, the Irish Government refused to authorise a separate, parallel inquiry. The pattern is unmistakable, and in some cases, agencies of the Irish Government crossed the line from passive antagonism into active complicity.

Former IRA intelligence officer, Kieran Conway, has admitted how leading members of the IRA were tipped off before Garda raids by Garda special branch. That was more than turning a blind eye; it was agencies of the Irish state actively participating in the subversion of justice. There are countless incidents laid bare before us, each one making this point plain. The most horrible one in my mind is from 1989, when two senior Northern Ireland policemen, Chief Superintendent Harry Breen and Superintendent Bob Buchanan, were shot dead in an ambush as they crossed back into Northern Ireland. After almost eight years of detailed investigations, the Smithwick Tribunal determined that the Irish police colluded with the IRA in organising that attack.

Between 1973 and 1999, the Republic of Ireland turned down 102 extradition requests, choosing to view murders in the north as political acts. The Irish state is not a neutral bystander. It was not some impartial observer. It was, in practice, a partisan actor—an actor that for more than 30 years has deliberately turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed by the IRA. For years, our armed forces have properly faced scrutiny for their actions during the troubles. We have answered that scrutiny with honesty—never to erase the truth, but to confront it. Yet we hear nothing of the de facto amnesties given to terrorists and murderers, nothing of the collusion that allowed that terror to take root, and nothing from the Government about preventing the vexatious pursuit of our soldiers, who are guilty of nothing but bravely serving their country during the dark days of the troubles. Instead, all we see are relentless attacks on those

soldiers, with doubt introduced about the legitimacy of their actions, and the weaponisation of the entire legal process.

We had a warning of that in a letter on Remembrance Day, when those generals wrote in *The Times* of the damaging effects of lawfare, and specifically the risk posed by the Government's legacy proposals. They said that,

"the Government's Northern Ireland Troubles Bill, and the legal activism surrounding it, risk weakening the moral foundations and operational effectiveness of the forces on which this nation depends. Presented as a route to justice and closure, the bill achieves neither... This lawfare is a direct threat to national security."

The Government would do well to heed those warnings. Failure to do so brings injustice for those who served our country with honour, and threatens the future effectiveness of our armed forces. Every would-be enemy of the United Kingdom is watching how we handle this matter, and looking at plans for retaliation in our law courts as a way to avenge their defeat on the battlefields. As the generals warn in their letter:

"make no mistake, our closest allies are watching uneasily, and our enemies will be rubbing their hands."

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Before I call the Secretary of State, let me give a short reminder that we should not mention or repeat the names of individuals that are subject to proceedings.

6.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington (David Davis) on having secured this debate. The legacy of the troubles cast a long, dark shadow over the lives of so many people in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom, including on some of those the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, and there are many, many others among the 3,500 or so who lost their lives. I would just say to Conservative Members that it is really important that in these debates we acknowledge all of those affected, not just some, even though some are, of course, extremely important. At some point, Conservative Members will need to acknowledge that the last Government's Legacy Act had no support in Northern Ireland. If we are to move legacy on, there needs to be support for the legislation, and that is why the Government are seeking to change it.

The Government, of course, take the concerns of veterans very seriously. Our commitment to Operation Banner veterans is unshakeable. The Troubles Bill, which we will debate next week, will put in place the strongest possible protections for them, none of which were in the last Government's Legacy Act.

The right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington talked a lot about prosecutions. As he knows full well, decisions on prosecutions are taken independently by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, and nothing that this Government are doing will change that at all. The system will be exactly as it has been for the past 27 and a half years, since the Good Friday agreement. On Loughgall, the reason there is going to be another inquest is because 10 years ago the Conservative Attorney General ordered that the Loughgall inquest take place—that is a fact.

Since nothing has changed in the past 27 years, why do we not look at some facts about prosecutions? Since 2012, there have been 25 decisions to prosecute individuals for troubles-related offences. Six of those have resulted in convictions: three were republicans, two were loyalists and one was military, with the soldier in question receiving a suspended sentence. If we look at the current, live cases that are before the courts, six are republicans, one is loyalist, one is a former member of the police and one is in the military category. What do the facts show? The vast majority of prosecutions are against former paramilitaries.

At one point in his speech the right hon. Gentleman suggested that there had been five or so prosecutions for all the deaths, but in saying that he ignores the very, very large number of paramilitaries who were sent to prison during the troubles, including many of them for murder. That was a very large number compared with the numbers of military prosecuted, as he well knows.

On the subject of immunity, of course I noticed the letter that was published in *The Times*. When I said repeatedly that the current Legacy Act would have granted immunity to terrorists, I heard Conservative Members saying from a sedentary position, "Well, that is not true", so let me quote from clause 19 of the Legacy Act. It says:

"The ICRIR must grant a person immunity from prosecution" if certain conditions are met, including that the person has asked for immunity from prosecution, that the information describes conduct that formed part of the troubles and is to the best of the person's knowledge true, and that the commission is satisfied that the conduct would have exposed the person to a criminal investigations. Shouting, "That is not true", when it is true—[*Interruption.*] One of the reasons why the Legacy Act had no support in Northern Ireland is because the families of all those who saw their loved ones killed did not want their killers to be granted immunity. As the right hon. Gentleman well knows—

6.23 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Westminster Hall

Thursday 13 November 2025

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Modern Day Slavery: Pakistan

1.37 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered modern day slavery in Pakistan.

I thank you, Sir Roger, for coming to stand in as Chair. We appreciate that very much. I also thank right hon. and hon. Members for coming along to participate in the debate, and I thank in particular those in the Public Gallery who have deep interest in this subject matter for attending and for all the hard work they do.

This debate is an opportunity to highlight the issue of slavery in Pakistan, particularly in relation to brick kilns. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Pakistani minorities, and I must speak in particular of Morris Johns, the administrator of the APPG, who is in the Public Gallery. It is through his hard work and the hard work of everyone on the APPG that we are able to highlight the issue in this House and to work freely to ensure that people in Pakistan can gain freedom.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to address the deeply tragic and profoundly urgent issue of the continued existence of modern slavery in various industries of Pakistan. I am going to focus on one of the most entrenched and brutal forms of modern slavery, which occurs in the brick kiln industry. It is a stain on Pakistan's conscience, a violation of human rights and a barrier to social and economic progress. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to this debate and granting time in Westminster Hall to discuss this vital issue.

I commend the excellent report on modern-day slavery and brick kilns that was published in May 2024 by the APPG for Pakistani minorities. It shed a vital light on the daily suffering endured by so many, particularly those from minority faith communities. Pakistan is the third largest brick producer in south Asia. Estimates suggest that more than 1 million men, women and children work in approximately 10,000 brick kilns in the Punjab region alone, yet despite religious minorities making up around only 5% of the population, the percentage of religious minorities in brick kilns is often as high as 50%, particularly in Punjab and Sindh provinces. Across the brick kilns, marginalised and excluded groups, such as the scheduled caste Hindus, Christians and Muslim Shaikhs, are working in horrific conditions, in bonded labour and without sufficient wages to afford necessities.

I have been to Pakistan twice in my time in Parliament. The last time was to visit some religious minorities, in particular the Ahmadiyya Muslims, and the time before that was with Morris Johns, when I had the chance to see more of what was happening in Pakistan. I would love to be able to report back that things are better, but things are not, and today is an opportunity to highlight one of the things that definitely needs to be addressed.

The history of brick kiln slavery in Pakistan is long and persistent. It is rooted in centuries-old systems of debt bondage and social and religious hierarchy. Landless labourers, often from marginalised communities, have been forced to work in kilns under the peshgi system, where they receive an advance loan from the kiln owners. The debt is then often inflated and manipulated and keeps them trapped for years, sometimes decades, along with their children and families. Employers often take advantage of the workers' low status in society.

As a result, entire family units are forced to work, with women bringing their new-born children to the brick kilns as well—it starts from the earliest of ages. According to a survey from the Islamabad-based Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability, 72% of brick kiln workers have children working with them in the kilns. It is a stain on our global conscience that the next generation are destined to face the same oppression as their parents. What happens to the parents and grandparents will happen to the children unless the necessary change comes. Despite the passage of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992, and despite Pakistan's ratification of international treaties that prohibit forced labour and child labour, the practice persists—indeed, it seems to thrive.

Weak enforcement, a lack of worker registration and the economic leverage of kiln owners have allowed bonded labour to continue unchecked, particularly in Punjab, but also in the Sindh province. The brick kilns are often in remote or suburban areas, so the communities working at the sites frequently face major issues in accessing quality healthcare, water, sanitation and education. One eyewitness account describes the harshness of the workers' conditions:

“They are barefoot, have no gloves, and work like this from dawn to dusk all day every day”,
seven days a week.

The health hazards of working in such conditions have been widely documented. Hazardous fumes emerge from the black smoke, resulting in higher rates of asthma and other health issues and increasing the risk of contracting tuberculosis. The contaminated water that is used to mix the soil, without any protective equipment, also gives workers at the kilns various skin diseases. When we work in this country, all the health and safety conditions are in place; in Pakistan, there are none of any description.

It is vital also to highlight the horrific nature of child labour and exploitation in the brick kilns. As children grow, they are forced to work gruelling 14-hour days and exposed to toxic fumes. Children as young as four or five years old have been documented in the kilns. They suffer from respiratory problems and severe malnutrition, and there are reports that they also suffer from poor eyesight as a result of their working conditions. Their mortality rate is higher than among children elsewhere. Children are often kept as hostages by the kiln owners to prevent their parents from leaving under the pretext of seeking medical care or shopping for essentials. Children witness their parents being subjected to violence and physical and emotional threats, greatly impacting their ability to develop into normal adults.

Child labour has persisted in Pakistan despite legislative reforms, which unfortunately have not translated into any kind of significant change. Only 12% of the children attend school regularly, so they do not have educational opportunities, and 62% have never been enrolled in a

[*Jim Shannon*]

formal or informal education programme. If somebody works here, there is an obligation that their children are in education—in the brick kilns of Pakistan, no. It is utterly unacceptable that this type of treatment has been allowed to persist and to grow. We must protect the dignity and wellbeing of these children.

The conditions at the brick kilns disproportionately affect women and girls. They are excluded from financial decision making and are unable to influence the negotiation of loans, yet they have to bear the consequences through the resulting bondage. Women are also increasingly susceptible to exploitation and abuse by their husbands or fathers. Devastatingly, in a 2019 study carried out on brick kilns, approximately 20% of the females admitted that they were sufferers of mental torture at home. A woman in this situation is stuck in a cycle of abuse; she has no option to escape or get away or to change her life. Women and girls have also faced extensive sexual violence and abuse in the brick kilns. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, about 35% of women workers at brick kilns are abused and harassed by their bosses. Many women in Pakistan's brick kilns are subjected to severe restrictions, with some forcibly confined to their homes by the kiln owners.

Two women brick kiln workers interviewed by Human Rights Watch's Asia division had been forced—these things are quite upsetting—to have regular sexual relations with their employer or members of their family as a condition of their stay in the brick kilns. Some women were even raped and abused by jamadars or local police officers, so it goes beyond the brick kilns to those who are supposed to enforce the law but actually abuse their position within it. Christian and Dalit women are particularly vulnerable—marginalised for being women and for belonging to a minority religious group or caste. Owing to a lack of accountability and active investigations, kiln owners act with impunity. Workers who are medically unfit are also physically beaten and verbally abused.

No person, regardless of faith or background, should be subjected to such grievous violations of their personal life in any way. As chair of the APPG for international freedom of religion or belief, I believe very much that people should be able to worship their God as they wish. Along with that come human rights, but those are often taken away from these workers.

Devastatingly, there have also been reports of—these are quite upsetting circumstances—organ harvesting at brick kilns, where the forced removal of organs is carried out to repay debts that are owed by family units. That is a horrific example of how deep chains of debt trap generations. It is almost unthinkable that, in today's world, men, women and even small children are treated in such an inhumane way—their very bodies seen as collateral for a debt that should never have existed in the first place. It is as if the brick kiln owners can use them in whatever way they wish.

The illiteracy rates have a powerful impact on how individuals and families remain in debt. A study on one brick kiln demonstrated that 80% of the workers were illiterate, which means that they were easily exploited and taken advantage of. As a result, kiln workers were unable to understand the terms of loans and interest rates and were rendered extremely vulnerable to exploitation by owners because, when the owner sets a paper down

in front of them or gives them instructions on what is happening, they accept that as gospel, whatever the facts are. That is just another way of exploiting them. The lack of education is not just a social disadvantage; it is a deliberate tool of control. When people cannot read the contracts that they are bound to or calculate the interest that is consuming all their wages, they become trapped in a cycle of servitude that can last all their lifetime and, indeed, generations.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group, I have seen at first hand how poverty, discrimination and lack of education combine to trap individuals in conditions that amount to modern slavery—the very thing that we are all concerned about.

Martin Rhodes (Glasgow North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for bringing this subject to us today. Does he agree that, despite legislation being in place in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world, we still see these problems of the undermining of human rights? Would there be, therefore, an argument for greater multilateral ways of policing these human rights violations and making sure that human rights are upheld?

Jim Shannon: Yes, there are many places in the world where international slavery is rampant. We can think of China and the Uyghurs; probably countries in central America; Africa, of course; and many other places. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight that issue.

I welcome the Minister to her place. I know that she is filling in for someone else, but I am always pleased to see her because she and I have been friends for many years. We came to this House at the same time and over the years have struck up a strong friendship that we both cherish.

When we work to ensure that religious minorities do not unjustly face discrimination solely because of their religious beliefs—these slavery issues happen across the world—most importantly we must advocate for a world where every individual has intrinsic worth and dignity. That is the world that you and I, Sir Roger, and everyone here would like to have—a world where people are respected. We can be different but respect each other. In Pakistan, those who work in the brick kilns are not respected by their owners or the Pakistan Government.

Every person, regardless of their caste, religion, gender or social status, is made in the image of God and is entitled to live free from oppression, fear and bondage. However, in Pakistan's brick kilns we see that that fundamental dignity is trampled upon and disregarded. Men, women and even children are treated as commodities. Their labour is exploited, their bodies and minds abused, and their freedoms stripped away. We must not turn our eyes away from the injustices taking place in Pakistan as we speak at this moment in this debate. In these debates I always use texts from the Holy Bible; the one I think of today is Psalm 82:3-4, which states:

“Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

Those words should be our guideline and incentive to ensure we do what is right. It is our duty to speak out against such cruelty. We must not ever remain passive.

We must ensure greater support from the international community to restore freedom, dignity and justice to workers trapped in slavery and bonded labour in Pakistan's brick kilns. Collectively, we must act to ensure that human rights frameworks are upheld with concrete accountability and the investigations to end generations of families remaining trapped without hope and support. Someone working in the brick kilns has little or no chance of getting away—no chance of getting out. I know that some of those in the Gallery and those who have a deep interest in Pakistan have organised many escapes from the brick kilns to give people an opportunity of freedom, liberty and the opportunity of a life outside of that. For that we thank them.

This is a country that champions the right to freedom of religion or belief, as this Government do and as we uphold in this Chamber every day. Today I asked a business question about freedom of religion or belief. The Leader of the House always gives us encouragement in the work that he does, as does the work done in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I ask the Minister to take a particular deep interest in this subject matter, as others will do as well, and ensure that we can have a proactive strategy coming out of this debate today to work on behalf of those people across the world.

It is essential that we place UK aid under greater scrutiny and monitoring. If we are going to give aid to Pakistan—as we do and as we should—there has to be a condition for how it is used: is it done fairly? Are there conditions on what they do with it? Yes, there are. It is the law in Pakistan that people have freedom, but that is not the reality. We need to make Pakistan aware of that.

We cannot possibly assist countries while foreign Governments refuse to protect the basic human rights of their citizens, particularly the rights to religious freedom, safety and dignity. When vulnerable communities are exposed to exploitation and persecution on a daily basis and in a deliberate fashion, there must be efforts to establish accountability and repercussions for Governments that continue to turn a blind eye to the realities of injustice and suffering in their own countries. Today is an opportunity to highlight that with the Minister, for all of us to agree collectively and, hopefully, for the Pakistan Government to respond and start to undo the injustice they are involved in.

We must ensure that the United Kingdom's generosity is not misused to sustain regimes or systems that oppress their own people. With that, I believe we must do a number of things. We must monitor Pakistan's compliance with international human rights law—are they doing it? At this time they are not, but they should be.

Pakistan is a party to both the universal declaration of human rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights, which both clearly outline:

“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.”

Despite those commitments, reports continue to surface of bonded labour and systematic exploitation in various sectors across the country—an exploitation that must come to an end.

Pakistan is also party to the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, which ensures an individual's right to work and the resulting commitment to safeguard that right, and to ensure that if they are working they are protected; that there is health and safety; that they are not exploited; that they are getting

paid the right money; and that they are not abused in any way by the people who own the brick kilns, or by others who happen to be there.

The Pakistan Government must fully comply with the provisions of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992, which is part of their law, and with the related provincial legislation that should filter down from Government to the lower levels. It is vital to mention the International Labour Organisation's requirements on the prevention of slave labour, children's rights, women's rights and minority rights. There are binding obligations that exist to uphold the dignity and freedom of every human being. They must be followed to ensure the protection of vulnerable children and women, and indeed any person within that system. The UK must place greater scrutiny on monitoring Pakistan's adherence to the ILO's obligations.

If I am asking something from the Minister—and I do, ever knowing that the Minister will come back to give us encouragement, which is important—it is that we need to know what Pakistan has signed up to, what it is obligated to, and that it is actually doing it. We can use our aid to Pakistan to influence the direction that that goes.

We must also make businesses aware of the high risk of modern slavery in Pakistan's brick kilns and ensure that all UK-funded projects purchase only from certified brick kilns. It goes back to what the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes) referred to in his intervention about slavery—we need to control that as well and see the things that are being done right. This will not only help to prevent exploitation, but set a very clear standard for responsible business practices.

There are also some positive developments through the potential progress and modernisation of the brick kiln industry itself, through mechanisation, for instance. Benefits would include reduced reliance on human labour and improved working conditions. However, the use of modern technology, including mechanisation alone, would be insufficient. While we look to what potentially could be the future, we also have to be aware of what is happening today. Without legal enforcement and worker protections, freed labourers may simply be displaced into other forms of exploitation, and that should never be allowed.

The United Kingdom must continue to engage with Pakistan through diplomatic channels, encouraging meaningful reform, stronger enforcement of labour laws and genuine accountability for human rights violations. The dignity of every individual must take precedence over trade and economic interests, or any other considerations. It is through sustained dialogue that we can create change and permanently end the horrific practice of modern slavery and bonded labour in brick kilns.

I conclude with this: we must also work to strengthen civil society and support local advocacy groups. I thank the people in the Public Gallery who work hard to make changes globally in relation to brick kilns, but those who have friends and contacts in Pakistan must ask them to make those changes too. We must hold public and private actors accountable for upholding the human rights standards that we all agree on and adhere to.

Hon. Members in the Chamber will echo what I have said and share some of the evidence and information that they have on the horrendous violations taking place in Pakistan's brick kilns. We must not let the stories and the individuals be forgotten.

[*Jim Shannon*]

We have a duty to use our position and influence to speak up about the ongoing injustice on behalf of our suffering brothers and sisters in the Lord in Pakistan, and I thank in advance all of those who will take the time today to do that. This is our chance. As a Christian, I obviously believe it is important we do that; other hon. Members clearly think it is important too, and that is why they are here. I look to the Minister for the answers we need. We have a dire, dire situation happening in Pakistan that needs to be addressed, and I seek the Minister's help to make that happen.

2.1 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger—without you filling in, we could not have held this important debate, so thank you for your time. I also thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for opening this debate with such clarity and compassion. His tireless advocacy for persecuted communities, particularly Christians and other minorities in Pakistan, is both admirable and necessary. I also pay tribute to the all-party parliamentary group for the Pakistani minorities for its report, published in May last year, which brought essential evidence to the House.

As someone who has consistently stood up for justice, equality and the protection of all faith communities, I rise today with deep concern, but also determination, because we are confronting what is, in all but name, modern-day slavery. Across Pakistan, particularly in Punjab and Sindh, more than 4 million people, many of whom are from religious minority backgrounds, are trapped in bonded labour in the brick kiln industry. Entire families—mothers, fathers and children as young as five—work long hours under scorching heat, breathing in toxic fumes, and still cannot repay debts that often began with a small loan taken out of desperation.

Let me be clear: there has been progress, and it is right that we acknowledge that. Pakistan's Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992, as the hon. Member for Strangford outlined earlier, outlawed debt bondage. Provincial measures, such as the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act 2016, have banned the employment of children under 14.

We have also seen the launch of the Khidmat cards to support brick kiln families and encourage schooling, alongside efforts to register workers and enforce minimum wage. The introduction of zig-zag kiln technology supported by international partners, including the International Labour Organisation, has not only reduced air pollution, but offered a platform for improving labour monitoring and worker safety.

However, laws mean little without enforcement. A recent report by Pakistan's own National Commission for Human Rights confirmed what activists have long said: enforcement remains weak, inspections are rare and many of the district-level vigilance committees meant to oversee bonded labour cases are either inactive or non-existent.

Behind every statistic is a human life. Yasmin, a mother of four from rural Punjab, took a small loan to pay her husband's medical bills. That debt chained her family to a brick kiln. Each day, she and her children work from sunrise to sunset. The smoke makes it hard

to breathe. They mould bricks with their hands in temperatures higher than 40°C, and still her debt grows. "Even when we sleep," she says, "we dream of mud."

Then there is Qaiser, who is just 11 years old. He wanted to be a doctor, but when his father fell ill he was pulled from school and put to work. He now spends 14 hours a day mixing clay instead of holding books. These stories of crushed dreams and invisible chains are not exceptions; they are the reality for thousands of families across Pakistan's brick kilns. As a proud Labour MP, I have always believed that every worker deserves fair pay, dignity and safety, but that belief must extend beyond our borders, especially when British aid, diplomacy or trade may touch the same industries that sustain injustice.

This is also a women's issue, as the hon. Member for Strangford outlined. More than one third of women working in Pakistan's brick kilns experience harassment or abuse. It is also a child protection issue. The International Labour Organisation estimates that more than 1 million children in Pakistan are involved in brick making, some starting work before the age of 10. They should be in classrooms, not kiln yards.

In my work in the APPG on safeguarding in faith communities, I have seen how easily systems fail the most vulnerable, especially when poverty, gender and faith intersect. We must not allow these women and children to continue falling through the cracks of international policy.

We cannot call ourselves champions of freedom and justice abroad if we stay silent about slavery when it is right in front of us. That is why I am calling for a number of things. I want stronger scrutiny of UK aid to Pakistan to ensure it directly supports the elimination of bonded labour, strengthens independent labour inspections and funds legal aid and education for freed families. Programmes such as Aawaz II and the Asia regional child labour programme must not just exist, but deliver measurable change for those trapped in modern slavery.

I also want mandatory supply chain accountability for UK businesses. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 must go further.

Martin Rhodes: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most effective ways the UK can combat modern slavery worldwide is by introducing due diligence legislation for imports? In that way, we can ensure that products brought in from Pakistan, China or wherever else are produced in ways that do not include slavery.

Ruth Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I hope the Minister will touch on that in her winding-up remarks. British firms sourcing bricks, construction materials or kiln-fired products from Pakistan must prove that they are not profiting from coercion. Ethical trade should be a condition, not a courtesy.

Certification and procurement reform is another area that I want to look at. I urge the Minister to support a credible slave-free kiln certificate scheme so that we can distinguish between law-abiding employers and exploitative operators. I ask the Minister to work with her colleagues to commit to excluding slave-made bricks from public procurement, both here in the UK and in projects we support overseas. I appreciate that the Minister is standing in, but it would be great if she could touch on those points when she is winding up.

My final ask is for diplomatic leadership. The UK must raise this issue consistently in dialogue with Pakistan, not as interference but as partnership. If Pakistan is to maintain its enhanced trade access through the European Union's generalised scheme of preferences plus, it must show tangible progress in implementing the ILO conventions it has already ratified, including those prohibiting forced child labour.

I do not believe in hopeless causes; I believe in the power of collective action, international partnership and moral leadership to transform lives. Earlier this year, 20 bonded labourers, including six children, were freed from a brick kiln in Sindh after a successful court intervention supported by local non-governmental organisations. That is what happens when laws are enforced, when civil society is empowered and when justice is made real. Let us support the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and countless grassroots organisations that work every day to free families, educate children and restore dignity.

No brick made through suffering should ever be laid in silence. As parliamentarians, we must not only speak of human rights; we must act to uphold them. If we do not stand with the poor, the exploited and the voiceless—especially those from persecuted faith communities—we will fall short of the values we claim to represent. Let this be the moment when Britain chooses to stand not only as a trading partner, but as a partner for freedom, dignity and change.

2.8 pm

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for bringing this important debate to the House.

Modern slavery remains one of the greatest violations of human dignity in the world. In Pakistan, an estimated 2.34 million people—more than one in 100—are affected by modern slavery. That figure places the country among the top 20 worst affected globally. Debt bondage, exploitative labour practices and gender-based inequality are driving millions into coercion and abuse. Pakistan's vulnerability score of 80 out of 100 demonstrates the scale of systemic risk—from the effects of conflict and poverty to weak governance and entrenched inequality.

Although Pakistan has made some progress, its Government response score sits at just 37 out of 100—below the regional average—according to international humanitarian rights groups. Victims continue to be trapped in cycles of exploitation, with women in agriculture and children in bonded labour facing the harshest conditions. Natural disasters, including the devastating 2022 floods, have intensified that vulnerability; they have destroyed livelihoods and forced many into debt bondage simply to survive.

The United Kingdom has a unique and historic relationship with Pakistan. Our two nations share deep ties through trade, and we continue to work with the new Government of Pakistan for the benefit of all Pakistanis. That partnership gives Britain an opportunity but also a responsibility to speak up for those whose voices are silenced. We should be deeply concerned by Pakistan's lack of action on modern slavery, as well as its lack of action to safeguard human rights, protect religious freedoms and defend minority communities. The UK must use its influence to encourage genuine

reform and work with international partners to ensure that all Pakistani citizens enjoy the fundamental freedoms and protections they deserve.

The hon. Member for Strangford laid out the evils of bonded labour in Pakistan. Pakistan has one of the highest numbers of bonded labourers in the world, with over a million workers in brick kilns. Bonded labour is an abuse analogous to slavery. As we have heard, Pakistan's Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992 was enacted to outlaw bonded labour, but its implementation has been a significant challenge, perhaps because of a lack of political will or capacity.

What help is the UK giving to Pakistan to implement the 1992 Act by encouraging will and assisting with capacity? What conversations have the Government had with the Government in Pakistan about ending modern slavery, and what support can the Government give to Pakistan, given their own commitment to achieving sustainable development goal 8, which targets modern slavery?

We must also remember, however, that modern slavery is not a tragedy that happens only overseas; it is happening here in the UK, often hidden in plain sight. It is present on our farms, in our care homes, in nail salons and even in drive-through restaurants. Modern slavery is not a crime of the past. Last year alone, more than 19,000 potential victims were identified in Britain. That rise has been fuelled by deepening inequality and increasingly sophisticated criminal networks that exploit vulnerabilities and target victims through online platforms and social media.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was rightly hailed as a landmark piece of legislation and demonstrated that the UK could lead the world in confronting this abuse, but nearly a decade on, charge and conviction rates for offences under the Act remain too low. The result is a system where victims slip through the cracks and too many perpetrators escape justice. If we are serious about ending exploitation and working with our partners in other countries, we must strengthen our own enforcement, protect survivors and ensure that the law delivers accountability as promised.

We Liberal Democrats believe that the fight against modern slavery must begin with action, both at home and abroad. Primarily, we would introduce a business, human rights and environment Bill that would establish a clear duty of care on companies, financial institutions and public bodies. The legislation would require businesses to carry out due diligence to prevent human rights abuses, including modern slavery and child labour, across their global supply chains and to report openly on their actions. Will the Minister commit to exploring similar legislation, and will she ensure that UK-linked supply chains in countries like Pakistan are not allowed to rely on vulnerable or exploited labour?

The UK also has a major role to play in demanding fairness in global supply chains. The fast fashion industry, including major sourcing from Pakistan, has long been associated with unethical labour practices. I hope the Minister will set out today what steps the Government will take to ensure that no product entering the UK market is tainted by exploitation.

Beyond supply chains, more can be done nationally. I would welcome a promise from the Government that they will review the modern slavery strategy to help

[*Monica Harding*]

them to address modern and evolving trafficking methods and take a victim-centred approach. They should restore the modern slavery fund to support innovative approaches to tackling modern slavery and back it up with a multi-year funding model.

Our message is simple: Britain must not profit from exploitation. That means holding corporations accountable where they are complicit in abuse abroad and ensuring that our trade and foreign policy reflect the values we hold dear: justice, dignity and human rights for all.

For the Liberal Democrats, human rights and preventing violations of international law such as modern slavery are the centrepiece of foreign policy. We continue to work tirelessly to abolish the death penalty globally and end the use of torture, and we would ban imports from regions complicit in egregious abuses. However, it is not enough to react to abuse; we must build the conditions in which dignity and liberty can thrive—from Pakistan to China and from Ukraine to Sudan.

On Pakistan specifically, I would like to turn to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Ahmadis are among the most persistently and brutally persecuted people in Pakistan. Their crime, in the eyes of the law, is simply to call themselves Muslim. Under Pakistan's constitution, Ahmadis are legally defined as non-Muslims. They are forbidden to use Islamic terminology, barred from voting and denied freedom of worship. Last week, I met the leaders of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in the UK, who described to me the grim reality of state-sponsored persecution. Fourteen Ahmadis are currently imprisoned, some for more than five years, for practising their faith. Their schools have been nationalised, their literature banned and their mosques destroyed. In the past two years alone, there have been over 50 attacks on Ahmadi places of worship and over 420 desecrations of Ahmadi graves.

For the Liberal Democrats, freedom of religion means freedom for all faiths whenever and wherever. I ask the Minister to make this issue a diplomatic priority. The UK must use its close relationship with Pakistan to press for immediate change, to hold perpetrators of mob violence to account, to release prisoners of conscience, to restore Ahmadi voting rights and to return nationalised schools. Britain's voice matters and it must be used to defend those whose only wish is to live and worship freely.

Modern slavery and persecution thrive where the rule of law is weak and indifference is strong. We will not turn away. We stand for a world in which every person in Pakistan and beyond can live with freedom, dignity and hope. Britain must once again lead with moral clarity and compassion, using its influence to not only condemn exploitation, but confront it, and building a future where human rights are not the privilege of the few but the inheritance of all.

2.17 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and especially today—thank you for saving the day by turning up to chair this important debate. I commend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for bringing another vital debate before the House in the characteristically noble fashion we have grown to expect from him. I also

commend the other Members who have contributed to it, including the hon. Member for Newport West and Islwyn (Ruth Jones), who always speaks with passion and principle. She rightly highlighted examples of the exploitation of children, women and vulnerable people in Pakistan today. She said we cannot stay silent on slavery, and she is absolutely right: Britain needs to have a voice on this issue. She is also right that there should be a link between UK aid to Pakistan and dealing with the atrocious issue we are debating, so that we can get rid of modern-day slavery in that country.

I commend the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), who spoke about the Ahmadi Muslims. I myself have spoken about the way they are treated, and she is absolutely right that that is another area that needs to be highlighted and that we need to support that community. She said that Britain's voice matters—absolutely it does—and we should use that voice strongly and clearly against the persecution and ill treatment we have been discussing this afternoon. I thank her for her comments.

Modern slavery is one of the greatest moral outrages of our time. More than 50 million people are estimated to be under the yoke of slavery across the world—more than at any point in human history. It is a sobering truth that while we in Britain debate our country's historic involvement in slavery, millions of men, women and children are being born, sold and trapped into slavery today.

Pakistan is a Commonwealth partner and a friend of the United Kingdom, and only 70 years ago we shared the same head of state, Queen Elizabeth II. It is because of that close connection that Britain can raise, and ultimately assist in eradicating, the concerns we are debating. According to the Global Slavery Index, 2.3 million people are living in modern slavery in Pakistan, making it one of the top 20 worst affected nations in the world, and 10 or 11 people in every 1,000 are enslaved, which is an outrage. To contextualise that, throughout the entire 200 years that Britain was involved in the transatlantic slave trade, 3.4 million people were taken from Africa to the new world. In Pakistan today, 67% of that number are living in modern slavery.

As we have heard this afternoon, the brick kilns of Pakistan are perhaps the clearest example. There are over 20,000 kilns across the country, employing up to 3 million workers, many of whom are trapped in bonded labour, with entire families working 14 to 16 hours a day in suffocating heat and toxic fumes to pay off debts that can never actually be repaid. These are generational debts of forced labour, which are passed from parents to children, binding generation after generation to indentured servitude in many of these kilns. Workers are paid barely enough to survive, let alone escape. Children—some of them as young as five—mould bricks alongside their parents. Women, often from minority faith backgrounds, face harassment, violence and sexual abuse from their employers.

The majority of brick kiln workers are from among Pakistan's poorest and least educated, and too often from religious minorities, including Christians and Hindus, who are disproportionately affected. Many families are lured into bondage by loans, which they take out as a last resort to pay for food, medical bills and dowries. Illiteracy means they rarely understand the exploitative interest rates or the false records maintained by their

employers. Their debts are also recorded informally and arbitrarily, which means they are effectively impossible to contest. Unfortunately, these workers are invisible to the state.

As was referred to, Pakistan passed the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in 1992, but over three decades later enforcement appears sporadic and ineffective. In the last Parliament, a report from the APPG for the Pakistani minorities, chaired by the hon. Member for Strangford, rightly said that

“successive governments have lacked the political will or capacity to enforce the law.”

The same report recommended that His Majesty’s Government use their aid budget to strengthen monitoring and compliance with International Labour Organisation standards, and even earmark £500,000 to hire inspectors to carry out unannounced inspections of brick kilns.

The aid budget might be a controversial topic at present, but I say to the Minister that if we are going to spend money on development aid, we should surely take up the mantle of our forefathers by taking the fight to slavery. When the Minister replies, will she tell us whether the Government will support the creation of a dedicated UK-funded inspection mechanism for Pakistan’s brick kilns? Will the FCDO consider making aid conditional on measurable progress in tackling bonded labour? Will the Department for Business and Trade issue clearer guidance to UK firms about the risk of slavery in supply chains linked to Pakistan’s construction sector?

Although we are focusing particularly on Pakistan, I am sad to say that it is far from unique. Across Asia, Africa and, shockingly, even Europe, cases of forced labour, human trafficking and child exploitation still persist. The ILO estimates that forced labour generates \$236 billion in illegal profits every year, which in state terms is roughly the size of the Portuguese, Czech or Greek economies. It is huge.

As I alluded to, this is also very much a problem for the United Kingdom. British consumers unknowingly buy goods produced through forced labour in a range of areas, such as fashion, electronics, seafood and construction materials. Will the Minister therefore outline what steps are being taken to update, reform and strengthen the Modern Slavery Act? Do the Government agree that development aid must be conditional on the efforts taken by recipients to tackle modern day slavery?

This House must not shy away from the fact that our nation has been the ultimate force for good in the world. We should speak proudly of Britain’s historic role in abolishing the slave trade, not apologise for it. It was this country that led the world—at great cost—in suppressing the slave trade in the 19th century. The Royal Navy’s West Africa Squadron rescued tens of thousands of enslaved Africans from ships flying other nations’ flags, and policed the eradication of the slave trade across the seas.

Today, the same voices that denounce our ancestors for slavery’s past—a trade that unfortunately predates civilisation as we know it—too often turn a blind eye to slavery’s present, as we have discussed. They are quick to pull down statues, yet slow to stand up for the children working in brick kilns, mines and sweatshops. It is easy to virtue signal about history; it is harder to confront the uncomfortable truth that slavery continues today in countries we trade with, partner with and fund, let alone in a Commonwealth nation such as Pakistan.

We should not therefore indulge in moral self-flagellation, but lead once again in the cause of abolition. The UK should prioritise anti-slavery measures in all development programmes in Pakistan; support NGOs providing legal aid, education and rehabilitation to bonded labourers; push for the digital registration of all brick kiln workers to bring them within the formal economy; and champion the global partnerships to eradicate slavery by 2030.

I suggest to the Minister that the FCDO publish an annual report on progress made against modern slavery globally. I emphasise that the UK should once again lead internationally, as we did two centuries ago, to ensure that every human can live in freedom.

Shamefully, modern slavery is not a relic of the past; it remains very much a stain on our present. The children in Pakistan’s brick kilns deserve the same rights, the same dignity and the same hope that we take for granted here in these islands. The Britain I know and love stands for freedom and for individual liberty, and is wholesale against oppression, whether that comes in the form of the state or the corporation.

If we are to influence affairs abroad, there is no finer crusade than the moral crusade to unchain children and their mothers and fathers from a life spent in forced labour and exploitation. Britain must lead this cause—just as we did before.

2.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Seema Malhotra):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship today, Sir Roger, and to respond to this debate. I am grateful to my good friend, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for securing the debate, and for his work on the issue through the all-party group and by contributing to the cross-party report that was published last year. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West and Islwyn (Ruth Jones) for her contribution, and to the Opposition spokespeople, the hon. Members for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding) and for Romford (Andrew Rosindell). I will endeavour to come back on all the points that have been made, and where I am unable to, I am sure we can follow up in conversations afterwards.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Strangford will want to join me as I express my deepest condolences to all affected by the tragic explosion in Islamabad earlier this week. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families, and with everyone on whom that terrible event has had an impact.

I am grateful to those who intervened in the debate, which has highlighted our shared determination to confront another grave injustice—modern slavery. I must also acknowledge the work of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr Falconer). He is the Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and he would normally have responded to this debate, but he is unavoidably unable to be here. He and I speak regularly, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond on his behalf.

Modern slavery refers to horrific situations in which individuals are exploited through coercion, threats, deception, forced labour and human trafficking. Despite the work that we have done and the abolition of slavery, which is such an important part of our history, so many

[*Seema Malhotra*]

forms of modern slavery still go on in the UK and across the world. We are determined, collectively, to do all we can to end it.

Bonded labour is a specific form of modern slavery, where a person is trapped working to repay a debt, often under conditions that make escape or repayment impossible. In the debate, we heard how Pakistan has an estimated 2.3 million people in modern slavery, including bonded labour, forced marriage and child labour. We heard about the billions of bricks made annually across the estimated 20,000 kilns, which employ more than 1 million workers. Many of those workers are trapped in debt bondage, because they take loans from kiln operators—sometimes for emergencies or basic needs, but the loans come with exorbitant interest that workers may not even be able to calculate, as well as unlawful deductions and a lack of transparent records. Children and entire families work to repay the debts, which are often passed down through generations. Some 83% of kilns surveyed had children working in them, many during school hours. Religious minorities, especially Christians and Hindus, are disproportionately affected. Up to 50% of kiln workers in Punjab and Sindh are from minority communities.

Let me reaffirm the UK's clear and unwavering commitment: we are determined to end all forms of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. We are working with partners to protect the most vulnerable, especially women and children, and to help survivors to rebuild their lives. That commitment shapes our engagement with Pakistan, and precisely because of that important relationship, we can engage frankly and constructively, including on human rights.

As we have heard, bonded labour remains a significant risk, particularly for already marginalised religious minority communities, which are disproportionately affected. We have welcomed moves by Pakistan to strengthen its response to forced labour and wider trafficking issues, including through its accession to the UN trafficking protocol in 2022 and the 2025 amendments to the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act and related laws.

As the all-party group identified, and as has been said today, legal enforcement remains a challenge. The UK's approach has been to combine diplomacy with practical programmes that strengthen laws, data, institutions and community resilience, alongside discreet advocacy in sensitive cases. We know that progress is possible, because when evidence, political will and community action come together, exploitation can be prevented.

Let me say a few words about how the UK is helping, and then I will respond to some of the comments and questions. Through the UK's £46.5 million Aawaz II programme, we support Pakistan at both policy and community levels. Nationally, the initiative helps to improve laws, policies and systems that protect marginalised groups; locally, it raises awareness, promotes behaviour change and supports people to engage constructively with the state to access rights and services. That has included practical work on bonded and child labour in sectors such as brick kilns. Because we cannot fix what we cannot see, the UK's support has helped to deliver some of the first child labour surveys in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, giving policymakers the evidence they need to act.

I should also mention our work in Balochistan through our Asia regional child labour programme—the FCDO's largest modern slavery programme—between 2018 and 2023. We helped to set up a child protection system that is already linking vulnerable children to support services. That is part of a wider preventive approach that puts survivors at its heart, and it sits alongside the UK's wider development partnership in Pakistan: investing in girls' education, strengthening health systems and building community resilience.

Jim Shannon: I welcome all the things that the Minister refers to—they are good steps forward, and that is what I would expect—but we have all mentioned that the young children in the brick kilns are not even getting educated. Some 80% of them have no education whatsoever. How will the Government target that issue? The hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) referred, as possibilities, to more inspections in the brick kilns and more work with the NGOs. I welcome everything that the Minister has said, but those are the key issues.

Seema Malhotra: The hon. Member has raised those issues in the report, and I can come back on a few points.

Our UK aid is delivered in Pakistan via trusted partners with rigorous safeguards. Our programmes focus on systemic change, strengthening child protection systems, improving birth registration and supporting legal reform. Through Aawaz II and the Asia regional child labour programme, which I mentioned, we have helped to register more than 3.4 million children and established referral services that connect vulnerable children to protective services. I will talk a bit more about that work. We are also doing work through some of those programmes to tackle early and forced marriages, which are a problem in this space, and raising these concerns regularly with the Government of Pakistan, including at ministerial level.

The investments that we are making in our work with Pakistan also address the underlying vulnerabilities—poverty, exclusion, lack of documentation and lack of access to justice—that traffickers and exploiters so often prey on; they believe and say that people have no option. We will continue to use our diplomatic network to encourage effective enforcement against those who profit from exploitation and to champion the rights of workers and of children to be safe, to be in school, and to be free.

We know that modern slavery thrives where rights are weak and discrimination goes unchallenged. That is why, in parallel with our work to tackle modern slavery, we consistently raise human rights issues with the Government of Pakistan, publicly and privately. We call for respect, for due process, for the rule of law, and for the upholding of the rights enshrined in Pakistan's constitution and international obligations. That is why the Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan has regularly raised these issues with his counterparts, including most recently in a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Dar in August when he voiced concern about the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. I know that is a very serious matter of concern to us all.

The British high commission in Islamabad regularly raises the subject of the rights and safety of religious minorities—such as Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Ahmadis—with the Pakistani authorities at the highest

levels. We also support interfaith dialogue; we support efforts to counter hate speech, especially online; and we support sensitive parliamentary engagement on laws that are misused to persecute minorities. We will continue to press for the protection of minorities, for full investigations where violence occurs and for accountability for those who are responsible.

Hon. Members have asked about our approach to modern slavery, and I will make this point about our work and our trade strategy. The Government have launched a review of their approach to responsible business conduct policy. That review will focus on the global supply chain of businesses operating in the UK, and it will be a neutral and objective appraisal of the UK's current responsible business conduct approach and alternative options that aim to enhance that approach. The review will consider the effectiveness of the UK's current responsible business conduct measures and alternative policy options to support responsible business practices, including mandatory human rights due diligence and import controls, among other measures. I am sure that hon. Members will want to consider their views in relation to that work.

When it comes to the UK funding more organisations that aim to tackle bonded labour, we recognise that UK resources are finite, as I am sure the shadow Minister does. However, we can prioritise programmes that deliver systemic change, and we can do that alongside our continuing advocacy. It is important that our UK aid is channelled through trusted partners. That requires due diligence and accountability, and we must ensure that it has impact and represents value for money. We welcome the all-party group's recommendations and share its concerns. Although direct funding for inspectors is not currently in place, I hope that our programmes that focus on systemic reform, and that support legal enforcement, data collection and community empowerment, are having an impact. We keep that work under review.

In conclusion, the UK stands with those in Pakistan who are working to end modern slavery. We will continue to combine evidence-driven programmes with principled diplomacy to help to tackle bonded labour and strengthen the rights that keep people free. That is the measure of a just society, and it is a cause that the United Kingdom will continue to champion.

2.45 pm

Jim Shannon: I thank everyone for taking part in the debate. I and my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Newport West and Islwyn (Ruth Jones) have the same focus, demands and compassion and the same energy for this subject, and I thank her very much. She was right to underline the need for regular inspections, which I think would be instrumental in making the change we wish to see. She mentioned the crushing of young children's dreams and gave two examples—an example always illustrates a story better than a thousand words, and she certainly did that.

I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Martin Rhodes) for his two interventions on modern slavery. He has the same interest in this matter. The Government,

and the Minister in particular, have indicated that modern slavery issues have to be addressed at every level. The hon. Gentleman referred to due diligence legislation for imports, and I am quite clear that there is a role for Government to play on that.

I thank the Lib Dem spokesperson, the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), for her contribution. She referred to the debts that are imposed on people and to the fact that the UK can and should influence Pakistan. She made the point clearly that we should all be equal in our religious freedom and human rights; unfortunately, the debate illustrated that so often we are not. She also referred to global support for tackling bonded labour and reducing slavery through legislation, and I thank her very much for that.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who is a good friend as well, clearly illustrated the Opposition's position. He mentioned that slavery across the world is at its highest level, and that Pakistan is a member of the Commonwealth and therefore our influence should be greater—and it should be; I agree with him. He referred to brick kilns as a prime example of what is wrong with the bonded labour system, in which people's debts just seem to increase continuously. He also referred to Pakistan's 1992 bonded labour law—something that Pakistan brought in and that Governments should be using to try to influence it. If that is the law that it has, then we should make it work.

I thank the Minister, as ever, for her contribution. I have absolutely no doubt that she wants to see the change that we all want to see. However, as the hon. Member for Newport West and Islwyn and the shadow Minister both mentioned, we should be making a point of asking the Pakistan Government directly to act on inspections of brick kilns. We should be working closely with the NGOs that work in Pakistan regularly and have evidence and information. I am conscious that this subject is not the Minister's responsibility, but if we have evidence—and I suspect we do—to show where things went wrong, can we send that evidence on to the responsible Minister to ensure that we can make a change? It is clear that the Government have a plan that they are working on. We want to work with them, through those who are here today, the NGOs and others, to bring about the change that is needed in Pakistan.

Thank you, Sir Roger, for filling in, for your generosity and for the time that you have committed to be here this afternoon when you were asked to—we all appreciate that—and I thank those in the Public Gallery for coming along. I hope that Westminster Hall has done them justice today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered modern day slavery in Pakistan.

2.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

Rogue Builders

[GILL FURNISS *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con) [R]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of protecting consumers from rogue builders.

I am conscious that we may have to go off for multiple votes before half-past 4, so I will crack on with what was going to be 45 minutes of the most magnificent speech—I will abridge it to just 42. I am missing out the bit where I was going to be nice about builders—I am afraid I will concentrate on the nastiness of builders.

I start by defining the area that I am keen to concentrate on, which is the smaller end of the market. Known as the repair, maintenance and improvement sector, or RMI, this is the area where we see many appalling stories of people's lives being ruined by unwittingly taking on so-called dodgy builders.

There are countless stories in the press, and there are TV shows specialising in these types of problems. I could turn to any number of articles in the national and regional press that talk about cowboy builders. A relatively simple search for stories of rogue and cowboy builders reveals 1,500 such stories in the last five years alone, and that is just the stories that made the press. This is a very insidious problem.

Chat to almost anybody who has had any building work done to their home, and they will roll their eyes and admit that they have had trouble of one sort or another. But we do not have to rely on hearsay and the media to understand the problems and the implications. The Federation of Master Builders conducts surveys to see what the effect is on the RMI market, and a recent poll of homeowners discovered that one in three were put off having work done on their home because of the fear of being ripped off. That equates to a possible £10 billion of lost economic activity.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): I would like to shine a light on one of those many stories. My constituent in Esher and Walton paid over £16,000 for a kitchen remodelling that was never delivered, and the same company is alleged to have defrauded other constituents, including one this year who lost £20,000. When fraud occurs on this scale, it is theft from honest people, but consumers find that the civil courts are slow, complex and costly. Does the hon. Member agree that the Ministry of Justice should ensure accessible routes to redress, which may be small claims courts or an ombudsman scheme, so that consumers can get justice quickly?

Mark Garnier: I will talk about that in my speech. The fundamental problem is that, at the moment, the only course of redress is through the court system, and it is not good enough.

The FMB does a lot of work in this area, and it is worth looking at some of its statistics. Thirty-seven per cent of customers report unreliability, and many of them cite apparently unqualified operators. Nearly a quarter—that is 25%—of all customers have lost money to rogues, with losses averaging £1,760, but in many cases the amount is far higher. The national loss is horrific. The FMB estimates that, over five years,

homeowners have lost an astonishing £14.3 billion to unreliable builders, putting an astonishing burden on the housing market and households. It turns out that young adults are more at risk, with 33% scammed by rogue traders found via social media.

The consumer is not the only victim of rogue or cowboy builders. Within the industry, many find themselves a victim of the same problem. Subcontractors find they are not paid, and it is the same for merchants. Plant hire companies are frequently the victims of theft and abuse of equipment. Alarming, health and safety is a low priority among many small and medium-sized building firms operating in the RMI market.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate, and he is absolutely right. In Northern Ireland, consumer protection against rogue builders involves preventive measures, official reporting channels and legal recourse through the Consumerline service, trading standards and the small claims court. The reality is that those protections are difficult to navigate, and they are often off-putting for people who are not used to filling in forms and writing things out. Does the hon. Member agree that there must be a more straightforward approach? People, who are often vulnerable and need support, should not have to jump through hoops.

Mark Garnier: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The current system does not satisfy people in any way, shape or form. Also, there is an inequality of risk, which I will come to in my speech.

Although large firms working on major commercial and civil engineering projects have embraced health and safety legislation, a blitz of small refurbishment sites by Health and Safety Executive inspectors in 2016 found that a stunning 49% of sites fell below the standards set for compliance with health and safety requirements. More alarmingly, that cavalier attitude to health and safety reveals the potential problem of cowboy builders leaving dangerous sites. When someone has an extension built, might they be risking life and limb when they climb those stairs? Poor-quality building results in not just shoddy work, but dangerous and potentially fatal work.

Rogue builders have an effect beyond their own unhappy activities. By undercutting reputable, high-standard builders that make up the majority of the market, they force them to cut their margins. Price competition is fine, but not when a worthwhile and reputable SME builder is competing against someone with no care for safety, honesty or customer satisfaction. Given that the RMI market is dominated by occasional customers—we are not doing this very often—it is quite likely that the key element of choice is price. Unhealthy price competition drives down standards, even if reputable firms are unhappy being forced to cut standards to compete.

In an extreme example of the problem—this is an important point—I recently met Andrew Bennett, who had engaged a local firm in Liverpool to refurbish a six-bedroom property that he owned—a job that was to be worth around £100,000. He checked out the firm and was happy with references and testimonials. He engaged the firm, but it turned out that the work was dangerously below standard. When he started to seek redress, he discovered that the company in question was not what

he had been led to believe. It was a rogue builder passing off as a well-known, reputable company. Moreover, this dubious company had nine county court judgments against it and therefore had no money to pay the award to Mr Bennett when he won his case.

That company was passing off as another. It was seeking to take money off an individual customer by deliberately misleading him, and it failed to deliver the work contracted by that customer under the cover of misleading him—fraud, by any other name, or by the actual name. Mr Bennett went to the police, who told him that it was a civil matter. He tried all the avenues available to him to get this individual bang to rights, but to absolutely no avail. The company continues to rip off people, in full knowledge of the local law enforcers, trading standards, the local council and planning department, and multiple victims of its activities.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. One of my constituents was ripped off to the tune of £19,000 when the builder walked off the job part-way through. However, when they went to trading standards and the police, they were told that, because the work had begun, it was a civil and not a criminal matter. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that more needs to be done to protect our constituents who are caught by that loophole?

Mark Garnier: Yes. It is shameful how these builders can get away with it—it is absolutely astonishing. By the way, this campaign has been going on for a number of years. It is very good to see, behind the Minister, the official who has worked with me in the past, although we have yet to achieve what we want to achieve.

How do victims of rogue builders seek redress? The answer, as we know, is not simple. They go to trading standards in the first instance but, with a rogue builder being, by definition, a rogue, the sanctions available are weak at best. Ultimately, the homeowner or small business owner who finds themselves a victim has no recourse other than the courts. However, the reality is that contract law simply does not work for people with problems above the small claims limit but below around £1 million.

The reality is that anyone can make up a fictitious bill that they want us to pay, and we have to negotiate. To challenge or defend that type of bill requires a commitment of between £100,000 and £200,000 in legal and court fees to prosecute a court case, and in professional fees to demonstrate the loss. I spoke to any number of friends and colleagues with very senior legal experience, and everyone said that this type of problem has absolutely nothing to do with justice and everything to do with negotiation. One even said that it is like being mugged and then being charged for the knife, with the backing of the law. For many reasons, our legal system is so clogged up that it serves no one properly, allowing it to be abused by rogue traders.

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman speaks powerfully of the devastation that can be caused by rogue builders, as families in Altrincham and Sale West have experienced. Many have been ripped off by Frank Deary, a rogue builder who has taken over £1 million for work that he has never finished. He repeatedly liquidates his various building companies, making it extremely difficult for victims to

recover any money, before he starts all over again with a different company name popping up. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this case, and so many cases that we all see in our constituencies, shows the need to crack down on rogue builders and improve customer protections?

Mark Garnier: The hon. Gentleman has probably read my speech, as that is the core of it. The legal problem is bigger than just failing to support victims through the court system. Rogue builders know the legal system works in their favour. There are builders who create fictitious bills or charge fictitious costs for work not carried out—I have seen that as a victim myself. I contracted a builder to renovate a much-loved family home, and they failed to do the work in time, which was a breach of contract. They rattled on for far too long, they did not do the whole work and, at the end, they put in a massive, fictitious bill. Our quantity surveyor reckoned there was an outstanding balance to pay of perhaps £6,000, but they put in a bill for £100,000.

In the end, everybody said, “You have to negotiate.” We negotiated a final settlement, which was multiple times in excess. This is a fundamental problem. We do not get redress, and we have to negotiate even if we know the negotiation is bogus.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. There are lots of excellent and reliable builders in Bournemouth East, but I am thinking of my constituents Andrew and Heather, who have really suffered at the hands of a rogue builder whose contact details they were unable to access. They got in touch with me because of their concern about their circumstances. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me, and with them, that the domestic building industry needs strong licensing and regulation? Without that, we will not stop cowboy builders exploiting my constituents.

Mark Garnier: The hon. Gentleman makes exactly the right point. We need a balance of risk, and I will come to that point later.

Consumers of repair, maintenance and improvement building services have no protection whatsoever. There is no practical protection for consumers to avoid the highly risky, unbelievably expensive and emotionally draining prospect of prosecuting contract law. Indeed, subcontractors working on my home were also victims of the rogue builder because they were not paid, either. It is extraordinary that consumers are unprotected. When we think about the whole process of refurbishing a home or building an extension, it looks even more astonishing.

The proud homeowner seeking to improve their home will go to an architect regulated by the Architects Registration Board. They might contract a quantity surveyor regulated by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. They will probably need to borrow money, so they might approach a mortgage broker regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. They will get help with a mortgage provided by a lender—again, regulated by the FCA, and possibly the Prudential Regulation Authority—with advice from a solicitor regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The money will then be deposited in a bank, again regulated by the FCA and the PRA.

[Mark Garnier]

The whole process is laden with consumer protection right up to the point where the money is handed over to someone with absolutely no regulation, possibly no qualifications, and no protection mechanism for consumers. As I said before, the problem gets worse, but it is worth repeating. The victim may well prosecute the case in court and win both damages and costs. But at that point the rogue builder goes bust with no assets, as pointed out by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand), and starts a new business the following day to continue the process of ripping off consumers. Meanwhile, the victim's costs are unpaid and run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. The consumer ends up winning the moral victory but losing an enormous amount of money, while the rogue builder goes on to do the same again without any consequence.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): As well as the financial cost, there is also an emotional cost. A constituent got in touch with me after trying to resolve an issue with leaking roof insulation. When we got involved, it took us eight months and 97 emails to get the builder back out to repair it. There is an emotional impact on the whole family. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is an intolerable burden to put on people, and that we need to do something more?

Mark Garnier: Absolutely. Not only that, but if we think about the consequences, those 97 emails could have been sent for any one of the 100,000 constituents that we each have. We should not be doing this, and there should be a mechanism to sort it out.

The important reality of all this is that there is no disincentive at all for the cowboy builder to present fictitious bills and do bad work. While the consumer must engage in a risky legal process, the rogue builder can game the system with no jeopardy whatever. As we learned from Mr Bennett's story in Merseyside and the many other people who contacted me, the police will not investigate a case with regard to fraud and rogue builders, as they deem it a civil matter.

So what is the solution? How do we protect honest builders, subcontractors, merchants and, importantly, our constituents and consumers? How do we redress the balance of risk so that it does not favour the rogue builder but gives equal weight to both consumer and builder? The builder is not always in the wrong, so the solution must be balanced. Builders may occasionally need to be protected from rogue customers. The answer must lie in a scheme of regulation and licensing. In essence, what I am seeking to do—I have had a couple of presentation Bills on this topic—is get the Government to come up with a scheme of compulsory licensing for SME building firms working in the renovation and domestic improvement space. We do not know what it will be, but we need a system in which there is an equivalence of risk on both sides. There must be something that the builder as an individual can lose if he or she is found not to be doing their job properly.

My experience in this area has been with financial services and regulatory reform. Although I am not proposing anything remotely as complex as the FCA or the PRA to regulate builders, there is more than one important carry-across from financial services regulation.

The first is that we do not want regulation to be a burden on the taxpayer. A licensing scheme must be self-financed through licensing fees: the building firms must pay for it.

Rules for having a licence must be straightforward. Importantly, no firm or individual should be allowed to offer services directly to customers without a licence. That in itself would result in the wider building industry policing the market. If a builder knows that somebody else is a dodgy builder, it is in their interest to report them. Mortgage lenders would require evidence that money will be spent on a licensed firm. Architects and surveyors acting as project managers would need to see licences to engage a building firm in the first place, so consumer would know what they are getting. Consumers would be able to check the builder on the regulator's website, in the same way that they can check their pension adviser on the FCA register. The regulator could be TrustMark, which already offers voluntary regulation. There should be a code of conduct covering honesty, safety and quality of work. Failure to comply should have a series of sanctions, with the ultimate sanction of the loss of licence.

An option could be a compensation scheme. The Financial Services Compensation Scheme is an example of how consumers who have lost out as a result of poor practice can be compensated for their loss from a scheme financed by levies placed on licence holders in the relevant sector. The double effect is that the consumer gets their losses covered while the industry as a whole is incentivised to keep an eye on each other. An ombudsman would be able to assess consumer loss without the need to engage expensive and lengthy legal and professional experts to defend against bogus builds or to challenge poor work. These proposals aim to end the decades-long history of consumers who have been ripped off in one way or another by shoddy rogue builders.

I am conscious of time, Ms Furniss, but I want to acknowledge that the Government have started to resolve some of these issues. A New Homes Quality Board has been set up to ensure that new homes are built to a certain standard. That is a welcome development. The fact that it has an ombudsman demonstrates that the Government and I are probably thinking along the same lines in a broad sense, but the New Homes Quality Board is targeted specifically at the new homes market. Given the Government's target of 1.5 million new homes, it will have its work cut out. Importantly, it is not designed for the RM&I sector, which remains wholly unregulated and unsupervised. That is what the Minister must concentrate on.

Many people agree that this problem in the RM&I sector is beyond redemption. The Federation of Master Builders report on this subject in 2018 said that even construction firms themselves agree that a compulsory licensing scheme is necessary. The industry wants it too: 77% of SME builders and 78% of consumers agree with the FMB's proposed licensing scheme.

Enough is enough. I have a few more words about my engagement so far. Unfortunately, the Housing Minister is on his feet in the main Chamber talking about the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. I was looking forward to beating him up a bit, because he has been less than brilliantly helpful. None the less, it is very good to see the Minister from the Department for Business and Trade in her place. I look forward to hearing her helpful

words about how the Government will introduce legislation to ensure our constituents are not ripped off endlessly by these wretched builders.

Gill Furniss (in the Chair): I am keen to bring this debate to a conclusion before the first of many expected Divisions is called, with all participants having had a satisfactory opportunity to contribute to it. Mr Garnier and the Front Benchers have graciously agreed to watch the clock, curtail their remarks and be very succinct. I ask all of you to be extremely brief with speeches and interventions.

I expect the first Division at 4.15 pm. To help me to enable all those who wish to contribute to the debate to do so, please stand now that Mr Garnier has moved the motion and made his speech, so that I can calculate accurately the initially informal limit on speeches that I will strongly encourage.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Gill Furniss (in the Chair): There will be a limit of four and a half minutes for each speech. I call Sarah Hall.

3.20 pm

Sarah Hall (Warrington South) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furness.

I am grateful to colleagues for securing a debate on this issue, because it is something that I am hearing more and more about in Warrington South. When people come to see me about it, they are usually exhausted and upset. Their home is supposed to be the safest place in their life, but instead they are living in chaos. Indeed, this is such a widespread problem that there are now entire TV programmes about cowboy builders, and newspapers and broadcasters regularly produce guides about how to spot and avoid them.

One constituent came to me after doing everything that a sensible person would do. They found a firm on Checkatrade, read the reviews, checked the company's details and were confident they had found a reputable business. They were not naive; they were careful and did their due diligence. However, once the work started, their home was devastated. The whole roof came off. Rooms that they relied on day to day, including the shower, were in a horrendous state for months. They ended up spending around £60,000 to put things right.

Trading standards officers were helpful and saw the case through the legal process. Eventually, the rogue builders received a suspended sentence for what they had done to three different families. But even then, the system did not come close to putting things right. The company had claimed to have insurance, but it did not. Under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, the judge had to set a limit of £50,000 to be split between all three victims. My constituent will only get back a fraction of what they lost, and frustratingly they still have not received the compensation they are owed. When we talk about consumer protection, we must be honest—it simply did not work for my constituent.

Members from across the House have described similar patterns of behaviour in their own constituencies. When the same individuals take thousands of pounds, leave homes unsafe and move straight on to the next victim, it looks and feels like fraud, yet too many people are still

being told that it is a civil matter. If we are serious about protecting consumers, we need clearer lines, so that the police understand when this issue becomes criminal and not just contractual. We need enforcement agencies with the resources to intervene earlier, and we should take a proper look at whether an affordable and proportionate licensing or accreditation scheme for builders would help to stop repeat offenders from slipping through the net. Most of all, we need a system that recognises what is at stake. Rogue builders are ruining homes across the country, yet victims are still being left to fend for themselves.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look closely at the gaps that this case has exposed in enforcement, compensation and basic protection, so that what happened in Warrington South does not keep happening to families across the country.

3.23 pm

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): This is an issue that is crying out for a solution. In my opinion, there are two principal remedies that need to be applied to the plague of rogue builders: criminalisation of those builders who are shown to have fraudulently fleeced their innocent victims; and a requirement for all builders to be registered with and licensed by a professional body, together with an insurance scheme to remedy failure or harm, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) has already explained in his admirable opening speech.

I have decided, on balance, not to identify the specific rogue builders and their victims to whom I shall refer today; however, I do not rule out doing so in the future. My first case study concerns Graeme, a constituent of mine who paid more than £1,800 to a builder in 2023. Although the same builder had done satisfactory work in the past, on this occasion he gave a succession of excuses for not turning up before ceasing to respond at all. A solicitor advised Graeme that it would cost more than any sum likely to be recovered for lawyers to be involved, and suggested contacting the police.

Graeme writes:

“I was born at the very end of the 1960s and, to me, if someone deprives me of my money, it is theft or even fraud.”

As someone born at the beginning of the 1950s, I heartily endorse that view, but the police responded that stealing £1,800 from Graeme in that way did not meet “the threshold for theft or fraud”.

Similarly, his bank was not keen to help once it knew that the builder had previously completed satisfactory work for Graeme.

Next, he found that trading standards could be contacted by an aggrieved individual only via a charity such as Citizens Advice, which also came as news to me. His CA recommended the money claims court; Graeme followed its advice and eventually obtained a county court judgment for £1,800 plus costs and interest. Even then, it took action at a higher court level for bailiffs to be appointed. They extracted a few weekly payments of a fraction of the sum stolen before giving up the ghost.

One might say that it could have been particular circumstances or misfortune that led the builder to let down his client—although that is no excuse for keeping his money. However, Graeme managed to establish directly that he had treated another victim in precisely

[*Sir Julian Lewis*]

the same way. Indirectly, Graeme heard of several others who had suffered in similar fashion. He was forced to conclude that, irrespective of a pattern of dishonesty towards multiple victims, the police still regard such behaviour as “a civil matter” and a “breach of contract”. Thus, with criminal prosecution closed off, all that remains is the costly, risky and often ineffective civil route. To date, Graeme has received a paltry £260, with more than £2,040 awarded by the court outstanding.

While Graeme rightly feels aggrieved by the injustice of his situation, my second constituent, Malcolm, has had his own and his family’s life totally upended by a truly nightmarish experience—one of the worst cases I have had to deal with in 28 years as a Member of Parliament. After a career of admirable public service in the Royal Navy and as a fireman, he has lost huge sums of money from his life savings and pension schemes at a time when a close relative with stage 4 breast cancer was meant to be benefiting from his support. It was for that purpose, I believe, that he commissioned the alterations—primarily converting a garage into extra ground-floor rooms—to his home in the first place.

Malcolm selected a building firm that he chose from a respectable trade recommendation website, where 5-star ratings for it were recorded. He agreed to pay about £25,000 for, supposedly, three weeks’ work to be undertaken while the family was on holiday in 2022. Despite an extra week’s delay, they returned to a scene of incomplete and utterly shoddy work and, in some respects, dangerous disorder. Indeed, Malcolm injured himself quite badly in a fall at the property that he attributes to this.

In addition to the very large payment made irrecoverably to the rogue builder, it cost Malcolm a horrifying £45,000 more for remedial works, which he had to undertake to make his home safe and inhabitable again. The trade recommendation website, which he thought had validated the rogue builder, offered its maximum level of compensation—a modest £1,000. Later, he discovered that the builder had no gas safety qualification, as he had falsely claimed.

Malcolm succeeded in communicating with trading standards, which indicated that it would be helpful if a pattern of similar construction disasters could be established. Malcolm therefore turned investigator, and discovered several other families in my constituency and in nearby Southampton. He calculated total losses caused by the same rogue builder to be at least £200,000. One victim, a lady living with multiple sclerosis, was left without a functioning toilet.

The police, nevertheless, still insist that the threshold for criminality had not been reached. If so, that threshold needs to be changed, and changed substantially. Despite correspondence from me to Hampshire county council pointing out the multiple victims, the apparent evidence of companies being repeatedly set up and dissolved by the rogue builder—as we have heard from another hon. Member—and his not infrequent changes to his own name, nothing effective has been done to punish or constrain him in any way.

As stated at the outset, there are two fairly obvious remedies. First, if the police are right that the current state of the law prevents such devastating and ruthless misbehaviour reaching the threshold of criminality, that threshold must be repositioned by legislation to include it. Secondly, like other skilled professions, builders must

be licensed before being allowed to operate. The good news is that, as we have heard, the Federation of Master Builders is ready and able to undertake this vital role. That must be coupled with an insurance scheme to which builders will contribute to enable redress where appropriate and where standards are breached. Rogue builders can ruin lives; now is the time to banish that evil.

3.29 pm

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) for securing this important debate on protecting consumers from rogue builders—an issue that affects thousands of families, honest tradespeople and small businesses across the country.

In my constituency I have spoken to homeowners left heartbroken and out of pocket after rogue traders walked away leaving unfinished work, and skilled local tradespeople who tell me they are being undercut by those who cut corners, dodge taxes and disappear when something goes wrong. Every year, hard-working homeowners lose an estimated £1.4 billion through rogue traders, not to mention suffering emotional stress, anxiety and shattered trust. At the same time, those rogue operators undermine our legitimate, qualified tradespeople who play by the rules, pay their taxes, insure their work, and uphold professional standards and training. They damage the reputation of the entire construction and home improvement sector, making it harder for honest builders to win work and for consumers to know who to trust.

As in many parts of the country, residents in Portsmouth have been affected by rogue builders who exploit trust and cause real distress. The crimes often target vulnerable people, such as the elderly, or families just trying to improve their homes. In one case in my city, an elderly couple paid thousands of pounds from their pension savings for essential roof and patio repairs, only to be left with unsafe and unfinished work. They were forced to pay even more just to make their home liveable again. In another example, a family hired a builder to renovate their garage; instead of safely removing the asbestos roof, the contractor left open bags of hazardous material in a shared alleyway, putting neighbours and children at risk. The family had to pay for specialist clean-up and repairs, adding more financial strain to their emotional stress and worry.

In Copner, an area of my city, a local family’s home extension turned into a nightmare when the builder abandoned the project halfway through. He was meant to put a new kitchen in, but it became an unsafe shell that failed building inspection after building inspection, leaving the family out of pocket and living with disruption for years. Other residents across the city have been scammed by traders using multiple companies to take deposits for work that they have never finished—or, indeed, never started.

Those cases remind us that rogue builders not only cause financial loss, but damage confidence, safety and peace of mind. They also highlight the importance of checking credentials, avoiding doorstep deals, reporting suspicious activity and gaining our trades from social media. Concerns have been raised about trade websites, but I commend Checkatrade and other industry bodies that are working to raise standards. Checkatrade, for

example, has blocked 850 rogue traders from joining its platform in this year alone. It has also formed a primary authority partnership with trading standards, helping to strengthen consumer advice and set new benchmarks for best practice.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): A constituent of mine recently shared that she hired a builder who took payment for professional services—but everything about the work was fraudulent. She told me that she felt abandoned by a black hole of referrals, despite multiple agencies confirming that it was actually a criminal matter. The work is being investigated by a neighbouring trading standards, but that is taking far too long. Does my hon. Friend agree that the process of reporting and getting resolution has to be speeded up?

Amanda Martin: I absolutely agree. Voluntary measures only go so far, and the Competition and Markets Authority must step up to enforce this work.

The lack of consistent action against non-compliant trade recommendation sites undermines confidence, creates an unlevel playing field and ultimately hurts the very people we are here to protect—both consumers and legitimate businesses.

That brings me to another issue I have been campaigning on: tool theft. Just as rogue builders threaten trade in the industry, tool theft threatens its very foundation. Every van stolen, and every break-in on a building site or driveway, means another tradesperson unable to work, another small business losing its livelihood and another family struggling to make ends meet. More than 1 million tool theft incidents have occurred in the past five years. Tool theft costs the economy hundreds of millions, and fuels the black market and more rogue builders. I have been calling for a national register for stolen tools, mandatory marking and traceability requirements for high-value tools, and stronger police action and sentencing for repeat offenders. Protecting tradespeople from crime goes hand in hand with protecting our consumers from rogue builders: both rely on trust, fairness and accountability.

I urge the Government to take four steps: first, strengthen the enforcement of consumer protection laws and ensure that—

Gill Furniss (in the Chair): Order. I call Munira Wilson.

3.34 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on securing this debate, and for his record of campaigning on this issue. I also recognise the Federation of Master Builders for its important work in this area. I was proud to be at the launch of its “Licence to Build” report earlier this year.

Like many other hon. Members, I have heard regularly from constituents who have gone through horrendous experiences with rogue builders, and I have seen people in tears in my surgeries after suffering the effects. One couple who came to see me had their home turned into a building site when builders left trenches dug up around their house, having taken £36,000 from them. When the couple were asked to pay double that cost and they refused to do so, the builders disappeared without trace, leaving the work undone and parts of the couple’s home

unusable and unsafe. Another constituent’s builder continually demanded further payments for months before abandoning the work unfinished. The mental toll on the victims is hard to explain until we meet some of these people.

These builders, if we can even call them that, are simply allowed to get away with it because there is so little regulation. As we have heard from other hon. Members, rogue builders often close down their companies and re-establish under a different name, which makes it incredibly difficult for trading standards to go after them. Over half of UK homeowners, 55%, have had a bad experience with a builder, so this is not a small or hidden issue—and, as other hon. Members have said, it gives other, excellent builders a poor reputation. It is not fair on the rest of the industry.

Consumers are left with limited options, limited support and limited agency. Our system of redress is overwhelmed, underfunded and extremely complex. The small claims courts, trading standards, the Consumer Rights Act 2015, and the Competition and Markets Authority all have a role to play, but they are all far too weak. When homeowners have spent their savings or borrowed huge sums of money to improve their home, as is their right, they do not have money left over to chase people through the courts. There is no ombudsman, but how could there be when there is no regulation to enforce?

I urge the Minister to take back to her Department the need to be much more ambitious in this area. This problem is not just societal, but economic, given that the public have lost some £14 billion in five years to rogue builders. As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest said, this problem depresses demand because many people are too afraid to do extension or home improvement work. I hope that the Minister will give strong consideration to a licensing scheme that could be administered and regulated by the Building Safety Regulator. If she concludes that that is not feasible, for whatever reason, what other measures are Ministers willing to consider to strengthen the justice system in order to protect consumers and make it much easier for them to get redress from the rogue house builders that cause misery up and down the country?

3.38 pm

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on securing this debate. We have heard some harrowing stories from right hon. and hon. Members from across the Chamber. I am pleased that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) was able to share his story in full; what his constituents went through was utterly outrageous. I want to focus on the other end of the market and highlight a deeply troubling issue that has left families in my constituency and across the north-west region paying the price for the reckless and irresponsible actions of a house builder that failed to meet its most basic obligations.

The collapse of Stewart Milne Homes North West England in January 2024 exposed a glaring loophole in our housing system, which allows developers to sell homes without first securing the legal agreements that guarantee the adoption of essential infrastructure such as roads and sewers. In my constituency, three estates built by Stuart Milne were completed years ago but

[Andrew Cooper]

their infrastructure was never legally adopted. The streets were not adopted by the local authority, nor the sewers by United Utilities. Why? Because the developer failed to secure either the necessary bonded section 38 agreement, the section 104 agreement, or both. The result is that homeowners who purchased their properties in good faith are now told they must foot the bill to bring roads and sewers up to standard: we are talking about thousands of pounds for infrastructure that should have been properly delivered and adopted from the outset.

In Middlewich, residents on one estate had been waiting for a decade for the adoption of their sewers. It has been up to residents themselves to navigate the complex process of securing sewer adoption. After years of persistence, significant personal investment and tireless effort, their determinations have paid off, and the sewers on their development are now fully adopted. I pay particular tribute to Claire Bertram for seeing this through—but this situation is not just unfair; it is unacceptable. People buying a home should not have to become experts in planning law or infrastructure adoption. They should be able to rely on a system that protects them from exactly this kind of exploitation.

We need urgent reform to close those loopholes and prevent that situation from happening again. It must be a legal requirement that no home can be sold unless the infrastructure that it relies on—roads, sewers, drainage—is fully secured through binding adoption agreements. This is not a radical proposal; it is a basic standard of consumer protection. We already have a legislative tool: section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, passed by the previous Government, which provides a mechanism to ensure that sewer adoption is properly regulated. It is time to activate and enforce this provision through secondary legislation. We also need a parallel mechanism for highways—one that ensures that developers cannot shirk their responsibilities and leave communities in limbo.

This is about restoring trust in the housing sector. Families should not be punished for a developer's failure. We need stronger regulation, better oversight and a clear legal requirement that no home can be sold unless the infrastructure that it relies on is secured, adoptable and protected by law. Only then can we prevent this kind of injustice from happening again.

3.41 pm

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on securing this important debate.

Over the last year, I have been campaigning on behalf of homeowners affected by faulty spray foam insulation installed under the previous Conservative Government's green homes grant scheme. The aim was to improve the energy efficiency of homes across our country by offering households help to make their homes warmer, greener and cheaper to run. Many homeowners used the scheme to fund the installation of spray foam insulation. However, in a number of cases the installation was done incorrectly, causing moisture to become trapped, creating structural issues such as roof timber decay.

Under the green homes grant, as with other Government retrofit schemes, homeowners were told that only TrustMark-approved contractors could carry out the

work, yet we have seen substandard and unqualified contractors admitted to the scheme, carrying out poor-quality work and then disappearing when problems emerge, leaving homeowners to deal with the consequences. These cases have exposed a growing problem: the rise of rogue builders and traders operating under the banner of Government assurance.

Although spray foam may seem niche, that case is not isolated. It is a symptom of a much deeper failure in oversight and consumer protection. The Government's own quality assurance mechanism, TrustMark, as the hon. Member for Wyre Forest mentioned, is administered by the Department for Business and Trade, and it has failed in its most basic duty. TrustMark was established to ensure that only qualified and competent contractors were permitted to carry out work under Government-funded schemes, yet here we are with hundreds, if not thousands, of homeowners left with defective installations.

Recent announcements about improper installation under the Great British insulation and ECO4 schemes have further highlighted this failure. To put it simply, TrustMark is not fit for purpose. If the Government are to tackle the issue of rogue builders, they must start with those that they endorse under their own schemes. The Department for Business and Trade must work more closely with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to ensure that future schemes are properly monitored, contractors rigorously vetted, and consumers protected. That must include a thorough evaluation of TrustMark's capacity to deliver the effective consumer protection that it ought to offer. At present, it is failing to provide meaningful quality assurance or to keep rogue builders out.

What is worse is that these failures have created a second wave of exploitation. Rogue traders are now targeting households that had any form of spray foam insulation and offering to remove it, at great cost, even where the insulation is properly installed and functional. In many cases, these removals, which are completely unnecessary, cause further damage to the property, leaving homeowners with even greater costs.

These vulnerable consumers have been exploited not once, but twice: first by unfit contractors operating under a Government-endorsed quality scheme, and then by opportunistic builders and traders exploiting the chaos that that failure has created. As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) mentioned, often the companies are then wound up, leaving people without a mechanism or a person to seek redress through. This is precisely why stronger oversight is needed.

The Department must work with TrustMark to ensure that contractor vetting, auditing and enforcement are properly co-ordinated, leaving no room for unsuitable contractors to operate under the banner of Government assurance. Secondly, there must be clear and accessible routes to redress. Homeowners should not be left to navigate complex complaints systems or take costly legal action against builders who may already have vanished. While TrustMark offers a dispute resolution service, those who have tried it will know how difficult it is to access and how rarely it delivers meaningful outcomes.

I therefore urge the Minister to take up this issue seriously. TrustMark must be reviewed, consumer protections must be strengthened, and we must clamp down on rogue builders who exploit public funds and private households. Rogue builders are not just a nuisance;

they are a serious threat to consumer confidence, public spending and the integrity of the housing sector. It is time we treated them as such.

3.45 pm

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss. I thank the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) for securing this important debate.

A house builder and social housing provider have treated some of my constituents disgracefully. Three families with children bought shared ownership homes in Wokingham. One family refused to move in due to mould and damp in the house and the other two found mould all over the cupboards. It has been found that the houses were missing a crucial damp-proof membrane and course, both vital to keeping moisture out of the house.

There has been a real lack of communication and empathy from the company and housing provider, and they have ignored the residents' claims for many months. After my intervention, the social housing provider agreed to decant the residents while remedial work is done to the houses. It is now backtracking on that commitment, and it has taken far too long for the builder and the social housing provider to acknowledge fault, which has had a serious toll on my residents. It is clear that the builder and social housing provider cannot be trusted to build and maintain quality housing going forward.

I have one question for the Minister: does he agree that house builders and social housing providers must be held to account, and that local authorities must be able to end relationships with underperforming house builders and social housing providers to protect residents?

Gill Furniss (in the Chair): I call Ben Maguire. I ask you to be quite swift, because we understand there may be Divisions sooner than we expected.

3.46 pm

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on securing this important debate and giving an excellent and comprehensive speech.

Many people will be familiar with this topic. In fact, half of all homeowners have had a bad experience with builders at some point. Of course, those cases vary in value and scale, but fundamentally they represent consumers—many of whom are sadly vulnerable or elderly—being taken advantage of by rogue builders and traders.

Those people are all victims, whether they are in desperate need of emergency repairs or have committed to an extension they have saved up for over many years. They can be in a range of difficult situations: financial hardship, poor health or bereavement—some of those harrowing personal stories were outlined by the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis)—and for them, seeking a fair resolution can seem impossible.

Two months ago, I pressed the Solicitor General on the deeply troubling case of Launceston primary school in my constituency, a brand-new building that had to be demolished just as it was ready to be opened because it failed to meet basic safety and building standards.

When the developer went bust, it was us—the taxpayers—who were left carrying the cost of rebuilding the entire school to the tune of around £7 million.

Our communities deserve better safeguards and real accountability. Nationally, those stories are all too familiar, and those problems persist even in our sewage and road infrastructure systems, with many developers going bust before such vital infrastructure is finished. The hon. Member for Mid Cheshire (Andrew Cooper) made a powerful case for mandating infrastructure before the sale of homes.

Many of my constituents near Bude reached out to me to explain how a developer abandoned a site after going into liquidation, leaving unfinished roads and sewage works. The developer directly contravened planning conditions by not paying the bond, and yet the local authority had no power to act or hold it to account.

The Government cannot stand by any longer while those rogue developers fail to fulfil their promises. Those cases are shocking to hear, and the wider implications are clear. In the past five years, it is estimated that rogue builders have cost the public around £14 billion. That demonstrates the necessity of an efficient and effective justice system to resolve such disputes, protecting consumers and discouraging cowboy behaviour from builders.

Concerningly, as we have heard today, too many individuals in those situations find the justice system slow, complex and expensive to navigate. These are people in unexpected situations, without the time or resources to rectify them effectively. The Liberal Democrats believe that justice should be on the side of all consumers, not just those who can afford costly legal battles, as was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon).

The Government should ensure that there are accessible redress routes, such as small claims courts and ombudsman schemes, that work quickly and fairly for everyone. They should also support alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that save consumers time, stress and money, giving them a fair outcome without the burden and cost of going to court. That is important for the victims, and for the hundreds of thousands of honest builders who provide brilliant services for consumers up and down the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) made the point that the reputation of those businesses is damaged by widespread concerns about the trustworthiness of the industry as a whole. They, too, will benefit if we can effectively deter and catch rogue builders.

Since 2019, there have been more than 125,000 official complaints about rogue builders in England alone. The justice system must ensure that those responsible are properly held to account. It is crucial that proactive steps are taken against these traders through the Competition and Markets Authority and local trading standards bodies, to ensure that they are effectively punished and, where necessary, publicly named and shamed.

To that end, what are the Government doing to ensure that investigations by those bodies are properly resourced and supported? Crucially, to the point made by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand), how can the Government stop some of these repeat offenders going into liquidation time and again, and then committing the same frauds somewhere else?

[Ben Maguire]

How will the Government ensure that victims of rogue builders are provided with accurate and clear information regarding their options? What are the Government doing to support accessible redress routes, as well as out-of-court resolutions for these victims? Finally, will the Minister look into providing greater powers and resources to local authorities so that they can properly hold rogue developers to account and enforce planning permission?

3.51 pm

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Bourne) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Furniss, and to see the Minister. This is our second interaction in a week, and, under the direction of the Chair, it will be a lot shorter than the last.

I congratulate my very good and hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), on securing this debate. I commend his commitment to this issue over many years. Many of us turn up to these debates as one-offs, but he is a consistent champion for builders and against rogue builders.

My hon. Friend again raises a very fair and well-intentioned question: how can we in this place best protect our constituents from the scourge of rogue builders? He is right that the issue is caused by a minority of people and organisations in the construction industry, who exploit people's good nature and certainly do not deliver for their customers. We all know someone who has faced this issue, whether that is homeowners or subcontractors, particularly those in the repair, maintenance and improvement sector, as my hon. Friend pointed out.

We have seen the best of Westminster Hall today. I have been struck by the many excellent examples given by hon. Members from many different parties and from across the country of people who have suffered the consequences of cowboy builders. I genuinely thank hon. Members for their contributions to this debate.

This issue is not simply aesthetic or material; it can and often does have very serious consequences. That is why I am pleased that, in recent years, there has been some progress to address some of the problems set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest. For example, there are various competent person schemes that allow builders to self-certify, ensuring that they follow certain rules to comply with building regulations. These schemes ensure that customers are provided with the appropriate financial protection for a minimum of six years to correct work in dwellings that are non-compliant with building regulations.

For our part, the previous Conservative Government passed the Building Safety Act 2022, which introduced competence requirements on anyone doing design or building work. The legislation also brought about the creation of the Building Safety Regulator and the Industry Competence Committee, both of which help to encourage and monitor industry competence. I am nevertheless really looking forward to hearing from the Minister about what specific plans she and her Government have to build on that work to further address the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest and many other Members from both sides of the House.

Another part of what we can do to push out rogue builders must surely be to encourage those builders who

follow the law, play by the rules and deliver for customers. I would not be doing my job if I did not reflect the concerns of the builders I spoke to in preparation for the debate by pointing out that, unfortunately, builders feel that that is not happening under this Labour Government. Instead of backing builders who are not rogue and who work hard, the Government are determined to make sure that doing the right thing just does not pay.

I have spoken many times about the impact of the national insurance hike on the construction industry, but I want to use the last moments of my speech to ask the Minister directly, on behalf of the National Federation of Builders, about the builders tax that the Chancellor is proposing in the upcoming Budget. That will add another £28,000 to the cost of building a new home and drive up the cost of critical national infrastructure, including roads, schools, factories and even nuclear power stations. It will add significant costs to construction and the building sector, and I was asked to ask the Minister what is going on with this Government if they are proposing this tax by way of a formal consultation. On behalf of the official Opposition, I want to be clear that this tax cannot go ahead. Builders and construction workers want to hear her response to that specific point. There are so many hard-working builders in this country, and so many people who make something, and we must get behind them.

Gill Furniss (in the Chair): I call the Minister to respond to the debate—very briefly.

3.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kate Dearden): I will do my best, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on securing this debate on an issue that I know he has campaigned on for a long time, beginning when his party were in government.

I really welcome the debate. I am grateful to the many Members who contributed to it for raising their constituents' concerns and the horrifying cases that they have been dealing with in their constituencies. They set out the serious impacts that incompetent and rogue tradesmen have had on the homes and the physical and mental health of their constituents, who are sometimes elderly or vulnerable in other ways. I know from my own constituents the misery that can be caused and the toll it can take on people, as well as the time and money it takes to remedy problems. I thank Members again for their hard work, through casework and surgeries, to defend their constituents' consumer rights.

Consumers have a have a right to expect that work undertaken in their homes will be performed competently and that there will be redress if the work does not meet acceptable standards of quality and safety, and I want to take the opportunity to assure the House that the Government are committed to strengthening the system to ensure that that happens. I will try to align my winding-up speech with the winding-up speech in the main Chamber and move quickly to responses to points that Members raised.

The Government's aim is to improve the market and to support honest and competent tradespeople and firms, working with the industry and with local authority trading standards. The Consumer Rights Act 2015 sets

out the standards that consumers can expect in relation to the supply of goods and services, including building work, and the remedies available to them. Under the Act, traders are required to carry out a service with reasonable care and skill, and within a reasonable time. If those requirements are not met, the consumer can ask for the service to be performed again or for a price reduction. If that is not agreed, consumers can seek redress through the courts. The small claims procedure provides the means to pursue a claim of up to £10,000 at an affordable cost and without a solicitor, and consumers have six years to bring a claim against a trader.

Government bodies are also working with the super-sector working groups under the industry competence steering group, collaborating to improve trade and installer competence and to reduce the incidence of poor work. That process brings together over 1,000 individuals across trade bodies, professional organisations and employers to produce and implement competence frameworks across more than 130 occupations.

The Government are committed to strengthening competent person schemes that cover higher-risk occupations such as electricians and gas engineers. Competent person schemes must ensure that consumers are provided with the appropriate protection for a minimum of six years to remediate work that is non-compliant with the building regulations.

Other protections include the TrustMark scheme, which hon. Members have mentioned. That is the only Government-endorsed quality scheme for domestic construction. It covers trades such as fenestration, roofing, and kitchen and bathroom installation, as well as general building work, and it requires participating firms and tradespeople to demonstrate competence and provide for consumer redress. Government-funded schemes for energy and heat efficiency also require installers to hold relevant certifications and to provide consumers with access to redress.

I know that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest has campaigned for a long time on licensing schemes. Licensing or registration schemes exist in the US, Australia and New Zealand and aim to improve quality, protect consumers from incompetent contractors, and provide consumers with redress for poor-quality work. The hon. Member spoke about that in quite a lot of detail. However, few evaluations have been undertaken of the effectiveness of those schemes. The available evidence suggests that they can deliver some benefits, such as increased quality, but that they can also have detrimental effects, including increasing prices for consumers. There is also no clear evidence that the existence of licensing schemes reduces the incidence of poor-quality work. The schemes are reliant on audits and inspections of work to identify incompetent builders, which is similar to the approach of the TrustMark and competent person schemes in the UK.

There are also questions of how licensing schemes would be funded and administered, the implications for existing schemes in the UK, and the resourcing of the organisations responsible for the schemes. Any proposal to introduce a licensing scheme in the UK would have to be based on an assessment of costs and benefits and would have to address those issues.

Hon. Members also mentioned the issue of phoenixing. We are aware of the problem and work is ongoing. In the 2024 autumn Budget, we announced a greater focus

between His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Companies House and the Insolvency Service on tackling rogue directors and phoenixing. Key actions include closing loopholes in company registration and dissolution, targeted enforcement to boost compliance, and stronger referrals.

I thank the hon. Member for Wyre Forest for welcoming our New Homes Quality Board and ombudsman. From a consumer protection perspective, the Government are supportive of alternative routes to recourse outside the courts, such as alternative dispute resolution and the ombudsman. Many similar schemes already exist, and the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 strengthened ADR provision. That is also relevant to his comments and reflections on compensation, for which I thank him.

I am very conscious of the time, Ms Furniss, so I will move to my concluding remarks and just thank hon. Members for raising lots of other issues that I do not have time to go through. I will be working closely with other relevant Departments on the wider infrastructure issues that Members have raised on house building.

Sir Julian Lewis: What about the fact that these people, in some cases, are criminals and their actions ought to be subject to the criminal law?

Kate Dearden: I thank the right hon. Member for raising that point. Lots of Members have mentioned the complexity of determining whether something is a criminal offence or a civil matter under the Consumer Rights Act, whether we are looking at a trading standards matter or a criminal act, and demonstrating intent. It is a very complex area and I would be happy to meet individual Members if they want to talk it through with me.

I am sure that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Grantham and Bourne (Gareth Davies), does not expect me to speculate or comment on the Budget so close to its announcement. I am sure that his party, during its time in government, had lots of opportunities to address this issue. On his remarks on the licensing scheme, I think he can reflect on similar reflections that his Government worked through.

No one should doubt the human impact that rogue and incompetent tradespeople can have. This issue obviously needs to be addressed, and the best way to achieve that is by improving standards of consumer redress. Although there is no clear evidence on how a licensing scheme would do that, we will keep that under review. In the meantime, we will continue to improve standards of competence and consumer redress in the construction sector. I thank hon. Members again for raising cases on behalf of their constituents. I have run through a lot of them in my concluding remarks, but if Members want to talk to me directly about these issues or ask me to raise them with other Departments, I will be more than happy to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of protecting consumers from rogue builders.

4.4 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 13 November 2025

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

UEFA European Football Championship 2028: Funding and Benefits

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): In 2028, UK and Ireland will host the UEFA European football championship. This will be the largest sporting event ever jointly staged between our nations, spreading benefits across the whole of the UK and Ireland. The impact and legacy of the tournament will start far before the first ball is kicked and extend far beyond the final whistle. It will champion the power of football, including its ability to bring people together in stadiums, fan zones and communities across the UK and build cohesive communities.

To enable a safe and successful tournament, the UK Government have confirmed a funding contribution of up to £557 million for planning and delivery costs. This has been benchmarked against best practice in the delivery of major events to ensure it provides value for money, as well as the necessary funding to maximise the benefits of hosting, support host cities, and deliver on our legal obligations. Funding contributions will also be provided by the devolved Governments and Government of Ireland, host cities, and UEFA, which is primarily responsible for ensuring successful delivery.

As part of this funding, the UK Government will contribute £23 million towards a wider commitment from Government and football partners to a central legacy and impact fund of around £45 million, which will deliver socioeconomic benefits for communities across the UK and Ireland. Following an updated assessment, hosting the tournament is forecast to generate £3.6 billion in socio-economic benefits across the UK and Ireland, with £3.2 billion expected for the UK alone.

[HCWS1055]

UK Commission on Covid Commemoration Report: Government Response

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): Five years ago the world as we knew it stopped. Covid-19 affected everyone in so many different ways, and many continue to feel those impacts.

Today, the Government have published its official response to the report of the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration which sets out a programme of commemorative activity to mark this unique and challenging period in our country's history. This response has now been presented to both Houses of Parliament.

I want to place on record my thanks to the right hon. the Baroness Morgan of Cotes and all the commissioners for the care and consideration the commission gave to the report and for its ongoing advice as we have carefully

reflected on the recommendations. This Government are grateful to the devolved Governments, with whom we have worked closely to ensure that the response to the commission's reflects the efforts of individuals and groups across the United Kingdom.

The impact of covid-19 on all of our lives will never be forgotten. My thoughts are with the many families who suffered the devastating loss of a loved one during this time. As Secretary of State, I have had the privilege of meeting with a number of covid-19 bereaved family groups that have worked closely with us in developing this programme. I have heard at first hand the traumatic impact of not being able to be with their loved one, to hold their hand, to say goodbye.

I pay tribute to the covid-19 bereaved families groups for their tireless voluntary efforts to provide networks of support to help others feel less alone or isolated in their grief, while carrying their own. I am also grateful for their input to the commission and their ongoing work with my Department in developing this programme. As we remember and honour their loss, we are committed to continuing to work together as this programme is delivered.

The pandemic saw our communities come together in extraordinary ways to help and support each other in the most difficult of times. We saw acts of courage and dedication from the key workers who kept vital services running, and the millions who volunteered to support others in their time of need. We thank all those who worked so hard to keep our country going and these acts of service will be remembered as part of this commemorative programme.

In March, we marked the fifth anniversary of the pandemic with the covid-19 day of reflection, with events held across the country allowing people to remember in a way that was meaningful to them. In contrast to the experiences of isolation and separation we felt during the pandemic, the day of reflection was a chance for us to come together to remember the lives lost, the sacrifices made, and the impacts that many continue to feel. We will come together again on Sunday 8 March 2026 for this important day.

We will create dedicated webpages on gov.uk to provide information on covid-19 commemoration. This will include a repository of oral histories to ensure that the experiences of the pandemic are not forgotten, as well as details on the many covid-19 memorials that have been created across the country. Working in partnership with NHS Charities Together and Forestry England we will create new covid-19 commemorative spaces that reflect the importance of nature and the outdoors throughout the pandemic and provide spaces for contemplative reflection.

This Government are determined to learn the lessons from the covid-19 pandemic and build our national resilience. I have heard movingly from those who lost a loved one that they do not want others to experience their suffering. As the commission recommended, we will launch a new UK-wide fellowship scheme on natural hazards, delivered by UKRI, to support future national resilience as part of the commemorative programme to honour the loss and sacrifice.

In Parliament, we look across the River Thames to the national covid memorial wall. Nearly a quarter of a million hand-painted hearts span the wall as an outpouring of love created by the bereaved, for the bereaved. This

memorial matters greatly to the whole country. I want to thank the friends of the wall for their tireless commitment and dedication to care for the wall. As we commemorate the pandemic, we are committed to working with the friends of the wall and the local partners to preserve the wall.

Through this programme of commemoration we will ensure that those we lost are honoured, that we remember the sacrifices and resilience of so many during this unprecedented time in our history, and that as a country we do not forget.

[HCWS1054]

EDUCATION

Safeguarding Children

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson):

The whole country remembers with profound sadness the tragic murder of Sara Sharif by her father and stepmother in August 2023. Aged just 10 years old, the unimaginable cruelty of Sara's death at the hands of those who should have been her first and brightest source of love and care shocked us all.

Justice has been served, and Sara's father and stepmother are now serving life sentences. But as a society our response to this appalling case cannot end there. Just as we were a nation united in our grief for that precious little girl, now we must be united in our resolve to do whatever possible to prevent this from happening again.

Child protection professionals work tirelessly to improve the lives of vulnerable children across the country, often under challenging circumstances. I know they will have been just as horrified as the rest of us by what happened to Sara. But as a child protection system—and as a wider society—we must be brave enough to look ourselves in the eye and be open and honest about what went wrong. As the Prime Minister has said, questions must be answered.

Today's publication of the local child safeguarding practice review into the case by the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership is part of that vital process. The review provides an independent reflection on the changes required to protect children like Sara. Across all agencies concerned, it highlights mistakes that were made and opportunities that were missed.

I want to assure the House that this Government are treating the findings of the review with the strongest possible seriousness. We are already acting to close gaps, to strengthen safeguarding and to keep children safe. The first steps are set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which will sharply improve the clarity of information sharing and help make sure that children not in school (including those in elective home education) are safe.

The introduction of compulsory children not in school registers will empower local authorities to better identify children who need support and protection, as will the accompanying duties on parents of eligible children and out-of-school education providers. The measures will ensure that the most vulnerable children cannot be withdrawn from school until it is confirmed that doing so would be in their best interests. Local authorities will have to assess the home learning environment when determining whether an electively home educated child's education is suitable or whether it is in the best interests

of the most vulnerable children. Where it is not, local authorities will have the power to require these children to attend school.

Local support services matter too. By building on the evidence from programmes like Supporting Families, and more than doubling investment in prevention services, we are giving families and children access to the better services they need in their communities. That is how we will break the cycle of late intervention and help more children and families to stay safely together. The Families First Partnership programme, which started in April this year, will drive the national roll-out of Family Help, multi-agency child protection and family group decision-making reforms contained in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The Bill also includes a new duty for safeguarding partners to create the multi-agency teams in every area. They will bring experts together across social work, police, health and education to identify actual or likely significant harm and take decisive action to protect children. And new Family Help services will mean a single offer of support, delivered by the right people at the right time, reducing the need for multiple handovers between different professionals and unnecessary assessments for families and children.

Co-ordination is key. The review highlights that agencies and practitioners failed to "join the dots" to recognise the dangers faced by Sara once she moved in with her father and stepmother. We want agencies and practitioners to spend less time chasing information and more time acting on the full picture about a child. A new duty in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill clarifies that practitioners must share relevant information where it relates to safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare. It applies even without parental consent, allows practitioners to request information and covers information about other people around the child. We are also improving case management systems, developing consistent data and introducing a single unique identifier to improve data linking and stop children falling through the cracks of services.

Tackling domestic abuse and violence against women and girls is a priority for this Government. We will improve how courts respond to allegations of domestic abuse within private law children proceedings, including through the introduction of the pathfinder pilot courts, now operational in nine areas. We will put the child's voice at the heart, adopting a multi-agency approach to boost co-ordination and improve the family court experience for all parties.

We will tackle the causes of abuse too, growing the roots of a safer society for all. That is why we have updated the relationships, sex and health education curriculum to support positive relationships and help children to recognise abusive behaviour from an early age. And we know that to protect women, girls and all our children, we must back our workforces. We are upskilling social workers, investing in national graduate training routes, introducing a new two-year early career training programme for all new children's social workers, and rolling out new training on advanced child protection. This includes new post qualifying standards to help improve the quality of practice and retention. Domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, will feature prominently in the new programme that flows from the PQS.

We are also working with Foundations to generate evidence on what works to prevent domestic abuse and support families. The evidence will target how to consistently measure outcomes across different interventions, and how to support the recovery of babies, children and young people. Looking to the future, the cross-Government VAWG strategy is due to be published shortly. The strategy will set out how we will halve VAWG in a decade—as well as the further measures we will take to support the victims and tackle the perpetrators.

These are the first steps we as a Government are taking. But we know we must go further—as this review of Sara's case makes plain. We will consider the findings with all the care and consideration they deserve, and we will continue to strengthen the way we protect children in this country. But keeping children safe is a duty that spreads right across society. So, I hope that in the wake of this terrible loss, we will all come together and live up to our shared responsibility.

While the shocking brutality of her murder is impossible to forget, we must do our best not to remember Sara only in that context of cruelty. She deserves to be known for who she was, not just for what she suffered through. Sara was a 10-year-old girl full of personality, blessed with a lovely smile and a loud laugh. She liked to sing and dance. She loved her siblings. It is those precious memories of Sara that must now strengthen our resolve to give every child the full and happy life that she was so tragically denied.

[HCWS1052]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy Infrastructure National Policy Statements

The Minister for Energy (Michael Shanks): Having considered the responses to the consultation, I am pleased today to be able to present three revised energy national policy statements for parliamentary approval. This represents an important milestone towards achieving the Government's clean power and net zero ambitions. National policy statements are a crucial part of ensuring the planning system is fit for purpose. These revised NPSs provide greater clarity to developers and decision makers on Government policy concerning specific types of energy infrastructure projects and ensure that decisions are made in an accountable way by Ministers.

Investment in our nation's infrastructure is key to enable the growth the UK needs. The revised energy NPSs will ensure the UK has diverse sources of electricity generation, and that we remain at the forefront of low-carbon technological development.

The revised NPSs I am laying before Parliament today under section 9(8) of the Planning Act 2008 set out national policy in key energy policy areas:

EN-1 covers the overarching needs case for different types of energy infrastructure.

EN-3 deals with renewable electricity generation.

EN-5 deals with electricity networks.

The supporting appraisal of sustainability and habitats regulations assessment provides detailed environmental assessments of the updated NPSs.

I am today also publishing the Government response to the consultation, to which there were over 180 responses, and providing the Government response to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, which reviewed the NPS updates.

I will deposit copies of all these documents in the Libraries of both Houses and they are available on gov.uk.

[HCWS1053]

Small Modular Reactor Programme: Site Allocation

The Minister for Energy (Michael Shanks): Today I am pleased to inform the House that the Government have selected Wylfa in north Wales as the site to host the Government-backed small modular reactor programme.

Thanks to record investment the Government are making in our nuclear power sector, Britain is entering a golden age of new nuclear. The Government's SMR programme, led by Great British Energy-Nuclear, is putting the UK at the forefront of nuclear innovation, creating long-term economic benefits and good jobs in local communities, while opening up significant export opportunities. At the spending review the Chancellor committed over £2.5 billion to support the UK's ambition to lead the global race for SMRs, and announced that following a rigorous selection process GBE-N had identified Rolls-Royce SMR as preferred bidder, subject to final Government approvals and contract signature.

Following careful consideration, Wylfa, on the north coast of Anglesey (Ynys Môn), is the Government's chosen location for GBE-N's SMR project.

Wylfa is one of the UK's best nuclear sites, with a proud legacy and the capacity to host a fleet of SMRs. The initial project will see the construction of up to three Rolls-Royce SMR units, with GBE-N assessing the site to have the potential to host up to eight units, although this would be subject to future policy and funding decisions.

This decision will deliver once-in-a-generation opportunities for both Wales and communities across the country. For communities in Wales, building SMRs at Wylfa will create up to 3,000 new high skilled jobs at peak construction, attracting long-term investment and delivering an essential part of the UK's energy future—while supporting thousands more jobs across Britain's world-leading supply chain.

GBE-N looks forward to working with Welsh communities as this exciting project develops, with work set to start at the site in 2026. We will be progressing the SMR project across this Parliament and working towards a final investment decision.

But progress on SMRs alone is not the end of the Government's ambition. We have taken decisive action by making the biggest investment in new nuclear for a generation at the spending review, with Sizewell C having subsequently reached a final investment decision. On top of this, we have agreed a major expansion of US-UK collaboration, as we progress a new framework so Britain can attract the best nuclear innovation from around the world. We are also spurring the modernisation of nuclear regulation through the ongoing Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce.

Large-scale nuclear power stations will continue to make a vital contribution in our home-grown clean energy mix, complementing SMRs. Therefore, to pursue the option of a further large-scale reactor project beyond the current deployments at Hinkley Point C and the recently confirmed Sizewell C, the Government are announcing that Great British Energy-Nuclear has been tasked with identifying suitable sites that could potentially host such a project. GBE-N will report back by autumn 2026 on potential sites to inform future decisions at SR27 and beyond.

In any study, GBE-N would also be asked to look at site opportunities in Scotland, expanding on its commission to assess Scotland's capability for new nuclear power stations, including in areas that have benefited from nuclear in the past. This would seek to build on Scotland's rich nuclear heritage with the Government believing new nuclear could bring significant benefits in communities there.

Finally, I am pleased to confirm to the House that the former nuclear power site at Oldbury in Gloucestershire, which is also owned by GBE-N, remains under active consideration for future projects. GBE-N will continue early work to evaluate the Oldbury site to ensure it is ready for future deployment as part of our broad nuclear programme, including the potential to support any privately-led projects that might be developed by the nuclear industry. Our intent would be to utilise the site as soon as is possible and GBE-N looks forward to ongoing positive engagement with communities around Oldbury.

This Government's commitment to nuclear energy is unwavering—on SMRs, on advanced reactors and on Sizewell C we are making rapid progress towards delivering long-term energy security for the UK. We will continue to act decisively, invest ambitiously, and work with communities, industry and international partners to deliver this golden era of new nuclear—and with it jobs, investment and growth right across the country.

[HCWS1056]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Reform

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): Today I have announced, through an oral statement, proposals to strengthen police governance by abolishing police and crime commissioners at the end of their current term in 2028.

Police governance functions will be transferred either to mayors of strategic authorities or, where this is not possible, to elected council leaders through new police and crime boards. We will work with the Welsh Government to ensure these arrangements reflect the unique circumstances of Wales.

This reform reflects our view that the model of police governance needs to change, and is not a reflection on police and crime commissioners themselves. They and their staff have made a difference across the country to improve policing and keep the public safe.

This is the first in a series of reforms that will be set out in the forthcoming police reform White Paper to drive quality, consistency and efficiency in policing and ensure it is set up to deliver for the public.

[HCWS1058]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

AI Growth Zones

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Kanishka Narayan): I am publishing a Command Paper delivering AI growth zones, setting out the Government strategy to ensure the United Kingdom remains a global leader in artificial intelligence by building the infrastructure that underpins AI development and deployment, creates jobs right across the UK and grows the economy.

Artificial intelligence is transforming economies and societies worldwide. Being an AI maker, rather than an AI taker, is a critical goal of our modern industrial strategy and today we set out how we will build out the UK's AI data centre capacity to underpin this frontier industry and support the growth sectors of the UK. This is a strategic opportunity to drive growth, strengthen national security and improve public services. To seize this opportunity, we must build secure, resilient and sustainable compute capacity here at home.

The AI growth zones programme will accelerate the delivery of large-scale AI data centres by removing barriers to construction and creating the best possible environment for investment, while maximising the benefits for local people. The package announced today sets out:

A new north Wales AI growth zone, creating 3,450 jobs locally and delivering opportunities across both energy and technology sectors.

Reforms to accelerate grid connections, including prioritising connections for AI growth zones and enabling developers to build their own high-voltage infrastructure.

Targeted electricity price support for data centres in locations that strengthen the grid and reduce system costs.

Planning reforms in England to streamline approvals, update national policy guidance, and protect land for AI growth zones.

Measures to maximise local benefits, including an initial £5 million per site to benefit local communities.

A dedicated AI growth zone delivery unit, acting as a single front door for investors and co-ordinating delivery across Government.

Taken together, these measures have the potential to unlock up to £100 billion in private investment and create over 10,000 jobs.

Over the past 12 months we have secured over 70 billion of investment in AI infrastructure. Now, this ambitious programme will go further to secure our economic future and drive investment into parts of the country that have long been overlooked, securing the future of AI for local areas through new industries, skilled jobs and lasting economic growth.

[HCWS1057]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 13 November 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL		ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL	
AFFAIRS	289	AFFAIRS—continued	
Access to Nature.....	290	Water Company Executives: Accountability	297
Biodiversity	296	Water Pollution: Kent	293
Farrowing Crates and Cages.....	291	Water Sector Reform	294
Flood Resilience: Buckingham and Bletchley.....	289		
Food Waste.....	297	SOLICITOR GENERAL	302
Hunting Trophies.....	297	Rural Crime	303
Littering.....	292	Serious Fraud Office: Economic Crime	302
Solar Farms: Food Security.....	295	Support for Victims of Crime.....	305
Topical Questions	298	Violence against Women and Girls.....	307

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 13 November 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	29WS	ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	33WS
UEFA European Football Championship 2028:		Energy Infrastructure National Policy Statements.	33WS
Funding and Benefits	29WS	Small Modular Reactor Programme:	
UK Commission on Covid Commemoration		Site Allocation	34WS
Report: Government Response.....	29WS		
		HOME DEPARTMENT	35WS
EDUCATION	31WS	Police Reform	35WS
Safeguarding Children	31WS		
		SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ..	36WS
		AI Growth Zones	36WS

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CONTENTS

Thursday 13 November 2025

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 289] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Solicitor General

Business of the House [Col. 311]

Statement—(Sir Alan Campbell)

Police Reform [Col. 334]

Statement—(Sarah Jones)

Planning and Infrastructure Bill [Col. 357]

Lords amendments considered

Northern Ireland Troubles Legacy [Col. 439]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Modern Day Slavery: Pakistan [Col. 147WH]

Rogue Builders [Col. 165WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 29WS]
