

Environment and Climate Change

Volume 659: debated on Wednesday 1 May 2019

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I must inform the House that I have not selected either of the amendments.

 1.47pm**Jeremy Corbyn** >

(Islington North) (Lab)

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I beg to move,

That this House declares an environment and climate emergency following the finding of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change that to avoid a more than 1.5°C rise in global warming, global emissions would need to fall by around 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero by around 2050; recognises the devastating impact that volatile and extreme weather will have on UK food production, water availability, public health and through flooding and wildfire damage; notes that the UK is currently missing almost all of its biodiversity targets, with an alarming trend in species decline, and that cuts of 50 per cent to the funding of Natural England are counterproductive to tackling those problems; calls on the Government to increase the ambition of the UK's climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK's natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.

Today the House must declare an environment and climate emergency. We have no time to waste. We are living in a climate crisis that will spiral dangerously out of control unless we take rapid and dramatic action now. This is no longer about a distant future; we are talking about nothing less than the irreversible destruction of the environment within the lifetimes of Members.

Young people know this. They have the most to lose. A few weeks ago, like many other Members on both sides of the House, I was deeply moved to see the streets outside Parliament filled with colour and the noise of children chanting "Our planet, our future". For someone of my generation, it was inspiring but also humbling that children felt that they had to leave school to teach us adults a lesson. The truth is that they are ahead of the politicians on this, the most important issue of our time. We are witnessing an unprecedented upsurge of climate activism, with groups such as Extinction Rebellion forcing the politicians in this building to listen. For all the dismissive and offensive column inches that the protesters have provoked, they are a massive and, I believe, very necessary wake-up call. Today we have the opportunity to say, "We hear you."

Catherine West >

(Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

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As my right hon. Friend's constituency neighbour, I congratulate him on, many years ago, giving up his vehicle and on using mainly his bicycle for years as an MP. *[Interruption.]*

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I fear that my hon. Friend has unwittingly provoked lots of strange thought processes among Conservative Members.

Andy Slaughter >

(Hammersmith) (Lab)

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At the opposite extreme to my right hon. Friend's bicycle, the largest source of carbon emissions in the country is of course Heathrow airport. Given that, is it not folly to be going ahead with a third runway at Heathrow? Would not it be a clear indication from the Secretary of State today if he said the Government were not pursuing that course?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Obviously, aircraft emissions are one of the major problems we face in this country and all around the world. Like him and other colleagues, I was opposed to the expansion of Heathrow because I want to promote more surface transport in a more sustainable way, which is mainly on railways.

Dr Sarah Wollaston >

(Totnes) (Change UK)

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman and fellow cyclist for giving way. Does he agree with the young people who are outside this building that it would be easier and better to tackle climate change if we remained full members of the European Union?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who represents an absolutely wonderful town where environment is at the core of the lives of many people. We are not here to debate the EU or Brexit, about which everyone will be very pleased, but I would say that, under any proposal from my party, we would import into the UK all the environmental regulations the EU has adopted, most of which are very good and progressive, although often they do not go far enough, and there would be a dynamic—

Mr Speaker >

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Order. I gently ask the right hon. Gentleman to face the House so we can all hear him.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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Mr Speaker, you are absolutely the last person I would want to be offensive to, so I apologise. We would ensure that there is a dynamic relationship with those regulations, so I am trying to please both sides at the present time—*[Interruption.]* Such is the joy of politics when we want to protect our environment.

Sir Edward Davey >

(Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)

How the right hon. Gentleman is proceeding with his Brexit policy is interesting and will be noted outside this place. Does he agree that to beat climate change in this country and around the world we have to green our pension funds, banks and stock exchanges, decarbonise capitalism and drive trillions of dollars into the green clean energy investments that we need?

Jeremy Corbyn >

The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In a former life, I was a trade union organiser and negotiator. Even then we were discussing with the pension fund trustees how they would have environmentally sustainable investments and we would use that as a way of promoting green energy and such issues. I urge people, many millions of whom have shares in pension funds, to do exactly that.

Caroline Lucas >

(Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)

I welcome that Labour is now following the Green party lead in calling for a climate emergency, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that fossil fuel subsidies make a mockery of a climate emergency? We are one of the worst countries in Europe for giving subsidies to fossil fuel industry. Does he agree that it is not compatible with a climate-constrained economy to go on with these subsidies to fossil fuel companies?

Jeremy Corbyn >

Indeed, what we need is a sustainable energy policy and I will come on to that. I obviously pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work she has done on this. Often, she and I have been on exactly the same side on these issues of environmental sustainability.

Several hon. Members rose—

Jeremy Corbyn >

I will give way a couple more times but then I ought to get on with my speech, or else the Speaker will tell me off because others want to speak.

Colin Clark >

(Gordon) (Con)

On that point about fossil fuels, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise what natural gas has done to decarbonise this country, reducing our levels to levels not seen since 1888? Does he also recognise that 280,000 jobs are supported by the oil and gas industry? Is he concerned about those 280,000 jobs?

Jeremy Corbyn >

We want a sustainable energy policy in this country. I did not hear all of the hon. Gentleman's intervention as others were talking, but if he is talking about issues of fracking he knows perfectly well that this party is opposed to it because we want to see a more sustainable world and a sustainable environment.

Catherine McKinnell >

(Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)

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Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the lack of urgency in the Government's own targets, which they acknowledge they need to meet? For example, by the time we meet the reducing plastic waste target, I will be 66. Why should it take a quarter of a century to achieve that change?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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The whole point of today's debate is to declare an emergency to focus the attention of all of us on the sheer urgency of the issue because it is not going to go away; it is going to get considerably worse unless we act and set an example to other nations to also act.

Mary Creagh >

(Wakefield) (Lab)

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rose—

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I give way to the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

Mary Creagh >

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I congratulate my right hon. Friend on declaring an environment and climate emergency. Did he see the report the Committee produced last week stating that, if we leave the EU, the watchdog the Government are currently proposing is toothless because it does not have the power to fine Government for breaches of air pollution, water quality and waste standards? Does he agree that that is a very big barrier for the Government to overcome?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, the work her Committee does and the report it produced. The watchdog has to have all the teeth necessary to make sure the actions are taken. As I pointed out in response to an earlier intervention, there has to be a dynamic relationship with European regulations in order to achieve that. I thank her for her work.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Jeremy Corbyn >

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I am going to make some progress before giving way to some more colleagues.

I have been a Member of this House for 36 years. In that time I have observed something about this place that is glaringly obvious but seldom acknowledged: Parliament rarely leads change; it usually drags its feet— it is normally the last place to pick up on the major reforms that society is demanding. Think about the huge transformations in our society—workers' rights, women's rights and gay

rights. The impetus has always come from outside—from social movements and communities—while Westminster is often the last place to understand that.

Let us not repeat that pattern. Let us respond to what a young generation is saying to us in raising the alarm. By becoming the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency, we could, and I hope we do, set off a wave of actions from Parliaments and Governments all around the world. Surely if we lead by example and others follow, that would be the best possible answer to the all too common excuse we all hear on doorsteps: “Why should we act when others won’t?”

Vicky Ford >

(Chelmsford) (Con)

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This side of the Chamber was absolutely packed when my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) introduced the Bill to hardwire net zero into our economy. Where were the Opposition then?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I am not entirely sure what point the hon. Lady is trying to make, but I am pleased she is here today and I look forward to hearing her contribution.

Ellie Reeves >

(Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)

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Public sentiment and Labour’s position is clear: we must declare a climate emergency and legislate for net zero emissions. But the Government are procrastinating. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the political will to tackle climate change is there in the public and on these Opposition Benches but it is absolutely lacking on the Government Benches?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Let us show today that the political will is here, in this Parliament, to declare the climate emergency, which we believe is necessary.

Let us work more closely with countries that are serious about ending the climate catastrophe, especially those at the sharp end of it, such as the small country of the Maldives, so vulnerable to rising sea levels. It told the UN climate talks last year:

“We are not prepared to die”

and implored countries to unite. Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister recently warned of the “existential threat” posed by climate breakdown to the 160 million people of his country and urged others to adhere to their commitments under the Paris climate change agreement.

I attended the Paris conference in 2015 with my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner). I thank him for his passion at that conference, for his commitment to environmental sustainability and for the great work he did on forestry during the last Labour Government. It is a pleasure to work with him. He and the whole of the Labour party strongly support the UK’s bid to host the UN climate change conference in 2020, and I really hope that that will happen. When it does, Members from across the House will have a chance to interact with those attending the conference.

Let us also make it clear to President Trump that he must re-engage with international climate agreements. We must also be absolutely clear-eyed about the Paris agreement: it is a huge and significant breakthrough, but it is not enough. If every country in the whole world meets its current pledges as per the Paris agreement, temperatures will still rise by 3° in this century. At that point, southern Europe, the horn of Africa, central America and the Caribbean will be in permanent drought. Major cities such as Miami and Rio de Janeiro would be lost to rising sea levels. At 4°, which is where we are all heading with the current rate of emissions, agricultural systems would be collapsing.

This is not just a climate change issue; it is a climate emergency. We are already experiencing the effects all around us. Here at home, our weather is becoming more extreme. The chief executive of the Environment Agency recently warned that we were looking into what he called the “jaws of death” and that we could run short of water within 25 years. At the same time, flash flooding is becoming more frequent. Anyone who has visited the scene of a flooded town or village knows the devastation that it brings to families. That was vividly brought home to me when I visited Cockermouth after the 2015 floods, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), who is doing such a brilliant job as shadow Environment Secretary. She first challenged the Government to declare a climate emergency a month ago.

Around the world, we are seeing ice caps melting, coral reefs dissolving, droughts in Africa, hurricanes in the Americas and wildfires in Australia. Cyclone Idai killed more than 900 people in south-east Africa, mainly in Mozambique, and affected 3 million more, only to be immediately followed by the current horrors of Cyclone Kenneth. The heating up of our climate is contributing to a terrifying loss of animal and plant species, but sadly, that is something that we are only just recognising. I remember joining and working with the World Wide Fund for Nature when I was at school. According to the WWF, humanity has wiped out 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles since 1970—a year that many of us in this House can remember.

Earlier this year, the first global scientific review of its kind found that insects could become extinct within a century unless action was taken. Insects pollinate plants and keep the soil healthy. Without pollination and healthy soil there is no food, and without food there is no life. Meanwhile, there is far too much intensive farming. We are pumping far too many fertilisers into the earth, which is taking its toll on our soil. Soil degradation is a major issue, as anyone who reads the farming journals will be picking up on all the time. We are seeing the weakening of soil structures, and there is a need to strengthen them. More sustainable farming systems will lead in the longer run to better yields and less cost for pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers. The Environment Secretary himself has warned that we have only 30 to 40 years left before our fertile soil is eradicated, so I hope he will support the motion today.

Steve Brine >

(Winchester) (Con)

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I agree with what the Leader of the Opposition said about President Trump. It is time that he re-engaged with the Paris agenda, and dare I say that that would be a good subject for after-dinner conversation? The right hon. Gentleman mentioned leading by example, and he is right that this country must do that even though we play only a small part in the overall global emissions. Should he become Prime Minister, where does he think coal should sit in the balanced energy policy of the future?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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We need to see a growth in renewable sources and green energy, and I am coming on to that in my speech. We also need to see a reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

Justine Greening >

(Putney) (Con)

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way; I recognise that he has allowed a lot of interventions. We can all agree that there is an environmental and climate change emergency, and he is setting out some of the reasons that many of us—most of us, all of us—would agree with the motion, but is it not time for the House to stop scoring cheap political points and to start trying to find consensus? I ask him in all genuineness: if he is willing to sit down with others to try to find consensus on Brexit, is he willing to sit down with others to try to find consensus on something that is arguably far more profound—climate change?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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Last week, the leaders of the parties in Parliament, with the exception of the Prime Minister, attended a roundtable with a group of young people led by Greta Thunberg to discuss that very issue. Yes, I am very happy to sit down with anybody to discuss the issues of our environment and sustainability, and I invite the right hon. Lady to do exactly the same.

Mr Philip Dunne >

(Ludlow) (Con)

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On the subject of coal, does the right hon. Gentleman now regret the comments he made while he was seeking to become leader of his party in 2015, when he stated that he was in favour of reopening coalmines, and does he therefore deplore the recent decision to open a new coalmine in Cumbria?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I do not regret any of the statements I made in the 2015 leadership campaign. I was talking then about the way in which the coalmining communities in south Wales had been so disgracefully treated by the Government that the right hon. Gentleman supports. On the question of the Cumbrian mine, yes there is an issue there, and there is also an issue about the supply of coal that will always be necessary for fuelling the blast furnaces in the steel industry. This is why I am talking about taking a balanced approach to energy that recognises the need for sustainable industry and for reducing emissions. None of this is easy, but we have to move in the right direction by reducing carbon dioxide emissions and creating a cleaner, more sustainable environment.

Anna McMorrin >

(Cardiff North) (Lab)

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I agree with my right hon. Friend on the ecological crisis that we are facing. I am hosting Chris Packham here in Parliament today, where he will meet parliamentarians. Will my right hon. Friend join him and members of the Environmental Audit Committee in calling for a conservation audit to look at what is really going on out there with species biodiversity?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I compliment my hon. Friend on her work. An audit like that would be an appropriate response to the debate we are having today. She is right to suggest that unless we examine biodiversity loss, particularly in areas of monocultural agriculture around the country, as well as in urban areas, we will not know just how serious the situation is, so I do support her proposal.

Chris Bryant >

(Rhondda) (Lab)

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Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most disturbing aspects of this climate emergency is that some of the poorest people in the world live on the land that is closest to the rising sea levels? Anyone who is concerned about mass migration today should be truly worried about this crisis, because millions of those people are going to be travelling many miles to try to find a safe place with clean drinking water where they can make a home for themselves.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and I shall come on to it in a moment. At the heart of the environment and climate emergency is the issue of justice, and it is those here and around the world who are least to blame for it who bear the burden and pay the highest cost. A 2015 study found that children living in our British inner-city areas can have their lung capacity reduced by up to 10% by air pollution on major roads. Of course, the situation is even more extreme for children growing up in densely populated urban areas in China and India. The pollution levels in many cities around the world are damaging children before they reach the age of five. Children should not have to pay with their health for our failure to clean up our toxic air.

Working-class communities suffer the worst effects of air pollution. Those who are least able to rebuild their lives after flooding will be hit hardest by rising food prices, while the better off, who are sometimes more responsible for emissions, can pay their way out of the trouble. Internationally, in a cruel twist of fate, it is the global south that faces the greatest devastation at the hands of drought and extreme weather, which fuel poverty and war and create refugees as people are forced to flee their homes. Some of the 65 million refugees in this world—not all, but some—are in reality climate refugees. They are paying the price of emissions that come not from the global south, but overwhelmingly from the global north and rapidly industrialising societies.

Sir David Attenborough recently said on his brilliant television programme:

“We now stand at a unique point in our planet’s history. One where we must all share responsibility both for our present wellbeing and for the future of life on Earth.”

That is the magnitude of what we are talking about. It is too late for tokenistic policies or gimmicks. We have to do more. Banning plastic is good and important, but individual action is not enough. We need a collective response that empowers people, instead of shaming them if they do not buy expensive recycled toilet paper or drive the newest Toyota Prius. If we are to declare an emergency, it follows that radical and urgent action must be taken. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to avert the disastrous effects of warming greater than 1.5° C, global emissions must fall by about 45% by 2030 to reach net zero by 2050 at the absolute latest. It is a massive demand and it is a massive ask, and it will not happen by itself.

We are going to have to free ourselves from some of the harmful beliefs that have characterised our thinking for too long. The hidden hand of the market will not save us, and technological solutions will not magically appear out of nowhere. An emergency of this magnitude requires large-scale Government intervention to kick-start industries, to direct investment and to boost research and development in the green technologies of the future, and that is not a burden.

Albert Owen >

(Ynys Môn) (Lab)

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I congratulate my right hon. Friend on leading on this debate. Does he agree that the last Labour Government created a consensus on this issue under the Climate Change Act 2008, which was so ably led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and that that consensus included the need to work together not just in this country, but with our international partners? Will he join me in congratulating the Welsh Labour Government on declaring a climate emergency earlier this week?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to the work done by the previous Labour Government, which did so much to try and bring about awareness of the climate emergency. We have the chance to bring new manufacturing and engineering jobs to places that have never recovered from the destruction of our industries in the early 1980s. We need a green industrial revolution with huge investments in new technologies and green industries.

Zac Goldsmith >

(Richmond Park) (Con)

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The right hon. Gentleman is correct to declare a climate emergency and a broader environment emergency. He talks about radical action, and one action that we need to take is to protect the world’s forests. After transport, deforestation is the second biggest source of emissions. We are destroying around 20 million acres—a mind-boggling amount—every single year, and billions of people depend directly on forests for their livelihoods. So, from the point of view of biodiversity, humanitarianism and climate change, protecting the forests must surely be a No. 1 priority for any Government.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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The hon. Gentleman is right that that must be a high priority. I will be coming on to it towards the end of my speech, but he is correct that forests not only sustain a high level of biodiversity, but are a huge source of carbon capture, locking it up within the trees themselves.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods >

(City of Durham) (Lab)

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My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech about the need to address climate change. Does he agree that if the Government were really committed to tackling climate change, they would not be investing in fracking? Instead, they would be investing in renewable energy sources, such as tidal energy and solar, that would help areas such as mine in the north-east.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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Indeed. My hon. Friend knows my views on that. I attended a public meeting in a village in Derbyshire to discuss fracking, and I was impressed by the fact that all the people there were determined to improve their environment and wanted a form of energy generation that is more sustainable than fracking. They were worried about the dangers of pollution levels in groundwater and other issues, so I thank her for that intervention.

Historically, the industry that changed Britain was coal. Coal powered the first industrial revolution in Britain, but that was done on the backs of the working class at the expense of our environment. The green industrial revolution will unwind those injustices, harness manufacturing to avert climate breakdown, and provide well-paid, good-skilled and secure jobs. Imagine former coalfield areas becoming the new centres of development of battery and energy storage. Towns such as Swindon, which proudly made locomotives, could become hubs for building a next generation of high-speed trains. Shipbuilding areas that were once the heart of an industry that is now diversified around the world could gain a new impetus in developing offshore wind turbines and all the technology that goes with them.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) for her great work on the green industrial revolution and Labour's plan, which will create hundreds of thousands of jobs in renewable energy. The solution to the crisis is to reprogram our economy so it that works in the interests of people and the planet. That means publicly owned energy and water companies with a mandate to protect the environment instead of just seeking profit. It means redesigning public agricultural funding to benefit local business and sustainable farming that supports biodiversity, plant life and wildlife. It also means not unnecessarily flying basic products across the globe when they could be transported in a more sustainable way.

The solution means funding home insulation schemes, particularly where there are poor-quality homes—especially in the private rented sector—and I pay tribute to the work done on retrofitting homes. When I visited the University of Salford with my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South, I saw the work being done on the efficient conversion of back-to-back terraced houses into sustainable homes with energy efficiency. That means investing in bus routes, cycle routes and infrastructure, and reopening railway lines and improving railways in public ownership, so that people can travel quickly and cheaply, and not necessarily by car.

The solution also means big investments, such as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, and not prioritising fracking, which rides roughshod over local communities and damages our climate. It means planting trees to improve air quality and prevent flooding. It means expanding our beautiful forests, which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and provide habitats for wildlife. Sadly, the United Kingdom has some of the lowest levels of forest cover in Europe. It has expanded somewhat, but it needs to grow a lot faster. We must support tree planting initiatives, such as those in Leicester and Milton Keynes, and the brilliant initiative of the national forest in Leicestershire. It is exciting to think about all the opportunities we will have, if we take them. However, if Natural England's funding is slashed in half, we will see how austerity and cutting of funds reduce our ability to act.

Internationally, we must ensure that our defence and diplomatic capacity are capable of responding quickly and effectively to climate disasters around the world. We must take serious steps on debt relief and cancellation to deal with the injustice of countries trying to recover from climate crises they did not create while, at the same time, struggling to pay massive international debts. The debt burden makes it even harder for them to deal with the crisis they are facing. In our aid policy, we need to end support for fossil fuel projects in the global south.

Lilian Greenwood >
(Nottingham South) (Lab)

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My right hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the importance of justice. On Monday, I went to meet year 4 at the Milford Academy in my constituency because they had written on their concerns about deforestation in the Amazon rain forest. Is it not vital that we listen to the views of young people? They are the ones who will be hardest hit if we fail to act, and are they not right to call on us here today to commit to action to protect their future?

Jeremy Corbyn >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The message is that we need to do far more in this country, but we also need to carry that message elsewhere. I cannot be the only person in this House who is very disappointed by the statements made by President Bolsonaro of Brazil concerning the future of the Amazon rain forest. It is a precious asset for the people of Brazil, as well as something necessary for the whole world. We will be in danger of forcing into extinction species that we have never even discovered, and that is exactly what is happening at the present time. It means that a creative thought process is needed in our international relations.

The last Labour Government brought in some of the most ambitious legislation in the world with the Climate Change Act 2008, and I pay a special thank you and tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and others who brought it in. They did incredible work to ensure it happened, and I remember my right hon. Friend's work at the Copenhagen conference in 2009 when the UK was given a prime seat in the negotiations because we had genuine respect on this issue due to the Climate Change Act he had piloted through Parliament.

Since then, I am sorry to say, we have fallen behind. Conservative Members will boast that the UK is reducing carbon emissions, but I have to tell them it is too slow. At the current rate, we will not reach zero emissions until the end of the century, more than 50 years too late. By that time, our grandchildren will be fighting for survival on a dying planet.

The point that Greta Thunberg made to me and others when we met her last week is that we should listen to the science, which is an impressive thing for her to say on behalf of all the young people she works with and speaks for. The IPCC has said:

“Limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society”.

The IPCC has also said that such action is urgent.

The science says this is an emergency, but an emergency does not have to be a catastrophe. We could use it as an opportunity to rebuild our economy so that it works for the many, not the few. This is not a time to allow despair to take over, but a time for action. We can do this. The Government can improve the lives of our people while defending our natural world. What we do in this country can have an impact around the globe.

Let us embrace hope. The children in schools get it. They get it right away. They grasp the threat to their own future and, in fact, they want to be taught more about it as part of the curriculum and their normal school day. Are we to be content to hand down a broken planet to our children? That is the question we must ask ourselves today. We have a chance to act before it is too late, and it is a chance that will not be available to succeeding generations. It is our historic duty to take it.

I urge Members to support the motion before the House today.

 2.24pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs >
(Michael Gove)

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I begin by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for choosing today's motion, which provides us all with an opportunity to affirm our commitment to do more to deal with the challenge of climate change and to enhance our degraded environment.

I also begin by sending a message to the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), who, because of unfortunate family circumstances and a close family member's illness, cannot be here today. I am sure we all want to send her and her family our very best wishes. The Prime Minister cannot be here for this debate, as she very much wanted to be, because she is appearing before the Liaison Committee.

It is important to acknowledge that, across this House and outside it, there are many political figures and political leaders who have played a part in raising awareness of the challenge of climate change and in making it clear that we must do more. I am very happy to associate myself with the Leader of the Opposition's remarks in thanking the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) who, as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, was influential at Copenhagen in helping to raise ambitions worldwide. His Climate Change Act 2008, which was supported by both sides of the House, ensured that we as a country had, at the time, the most ambitious approach towards climate change ever.

I also thank the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). We served together in the coalition Government, in which he was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Although we did not always agree on everything, I put on record my admiration for the way in which he approached all these issues in a balanced, mature and reformist fashion.

Although it is rare that I have good words to say in this House about the Scottish Government overall, I have to say that Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Environment Minister, has shown leadership on this issue. Although we may have our differences, it is only fair to record that Roseanna's voice has been a strong and powerful one for the environment, as indeed has that of Lesley Griffiths in the Welsh Assembly.

The environment belongs to us all, and the cause of climate change is a fight that unites us. All of us in this House have a common humanity that we need to defend.

Sir Edward Davey >

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words. From my experience in government of two and a half years of negotiating on climate change with the European Union, Britain managed to ensure that 27 other countries raised their ambitions to our level. We managed to have leadership at the EU; we influenced America and China; and we influenced the Paris climate change treaty to make it far more ambitious than anyone expected at the time because we were at the European Union table and were able to lead on climate change. Does he realise that, by leaving that table, our influence on this critical issue for our world is being dramatically reduced?

Michael Gove >

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I repeat my gratitude to the right hon. Gentleman for all the work he did. There are a number of multilateral institutions through which we work, and this Government are committed—I am grateful for the Opposition's support—to bringing the conference of parties on climate change to London in 2020, to ensure that this country can build on the achievements that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) helped to secure at Paris and so we ensure that Britain can show global leadership on the environment and climate change.

Richard Benyon >

(Newbury) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend will know that he and I were on different sides in the referendum, but does he agree that it was deeply frustrating, as Environment Ministers, to have to sit in EU co-ordination meetings lowering the standards and ambitions of the United Kingdom Government to reach a single point of agreement? It is not a binary issue. Britain has a very ambitious international commitment, and I found myself constantly having to lower those ambitions to maintain one point of agreement.

Michael Gove >

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My right hon. Friend knows how important it is to negotiate hard in every international forum, but he also knows, as a former Minister who is committed to the environment and who supported remaining in the European Union, that there are committed environmentalists who are strongly in favour of our membership of the European Union and committed environmentalists who welcome our departure. Nobody could say that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) or Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb are, in any way, anything other than sincere campaigners for environmental enhancement, and they both feel—I think this is completely open to debate—that we can achieve those goals as effectively, if not better, outside the European Union.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I want to make a little progress. I will take more interventions.

I welcome the opportunity of this debate, and I welcome the support provided by Members on both sides of the House. I make it clear that the Government recognise the situation we face is an emergency. It is a crisis, and it is a threat that we must all unite to meet. The first British politician—in fact, the first world politician—to make it clear that climate change was an emergency was Margaret Thatcher. She was a Conservative and a Christian who believed in the principle of stewardship, but above all she was a scientist who followed the evidence. From Margaret Thatcher at the United Nations to Michael Howard at Rio and the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye at Paris, there has been a green thread of ambition running through Conservative Governments. That is why in assessing what needs to be done, it is important that we take proper account of what has been done. We must acknowledge our mistakes, but we must also recognise achievements across parties.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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With that, I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

Caroline Lucas >

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I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. His words are honeyed, as ever, but we need action, not just words. Last week, Greta Thunberg talked about the emergency and said that we needed action. Will the Secretary of State demonstrate his new-found conversion to this emergency by agreeing that the expansion of Heathrow airport is quite simply incompatible with our climate change commitments? If that goes ahead, aviation could, if it is given a blank cheque, be using up two fifths of our total carbon budget by 2050.

Michael Gove >

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The hon. Lady makes an important point. She talks about honeyed words, and of course one thing that the Government have done is to take action under our pollinator strategy to ensure that honey is produced in a more sustainable fashion. I am very happy to see more bees and other pollinators taking flight.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I want to make a little bit more progress. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) for the speech that he gave yesterday, as was mentioned earlier in the debate.

Caroline Lucas >

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Answer the question, Mr Gove.

Michael Gove >

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I am. My hon. Friend laid out what the consequences will be if we do not collectively take action. To be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, so did he.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I will not give way at this stage; I will do so shortly. *[Interruption.]* No. I mean no disrespect, but I must make progress. I cannot answer the previous question—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order. The Secretary of State is trying to make progress.

Michael Gove >

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Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will give way to colleagues from all parts of the House in a moment, but I must develop my argument. It is important that everything that the Government have done and need to do is properly analysed in this House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham pointed out, five of the warmest years that this planet has ever endured have happened since 2010. The consequences for us all are visible, and they have been recorded by Members from across the House. We have wildfires in the Arctic, the Ross ice shelf is reducing in size at a greater rate than anyone anticipated and glaciers are in retreat across Europe and in the Tibetan plateau. Those things are all evidence of the impact of climate change. Although statistics are sometimes abstract and the impact may seem distant, as individual citizens and as parents we all know that the next generation will face the consequences if we do not take action now to deal with climate change.

A warming world will result in the desertification of large parts of our Earth; our Foreign Secretary is speaking today in the Sahel about the action that we are taking to deal with that. As has been mentioned, the transformation of previously fertile lands into lands that are incapable of generating food will result in population movement, which will create challenges—as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, not just a security challenge for the global north, but a moral and ethical challenge for us all.

We in the United Kingdom must bear that moral and ethical challenge particularly heavily. We were the first country to industrialise, and the industrial revolution that was forged here and generated prosperity here was responsible for the carbon emissions that have driven global warming. The burden of that is borne, even now, by those in the global south, so we have a responsibility to show leadership. It is vital that we reduce our emissions, for the defence and protection of those in small island developing states who face the prospect of coastal erosion and damage to their economies. That is why the Government are committed to spending £5 billion every year on helping developing nations to deal with the prospect of climate change.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I am now happy to give way, and I will do so first to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker).

Mr Charles Walker >

(Broxbourne) (Con)

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I thank the Secretary of State and his ministerial team for their leadership on chalk streams. This country has 85% of the world's chalk streams, many of which are in my constituency and are degraded. The Secretary of State recognises that, so may I urge him to bring forward the Abingdon reservoir plan as soon as possible?

Michael Gove >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Biodiversity is declining precipitately not just in chalk streams, but in Scotland's salmon rivers, and we need to take action. We need to work with water companies, landowners and farmers to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to restore our rivers to health, for the sake not only of recreational anglers but of all who believe in biodiversity.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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In fairness, I must give way to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who has been seeking to intervene from the start.

Frank Field >

(Birkenhead) (Ind)

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I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Ten years ago, I helped to form Cool Earth, which is brilliantly run by Matthew Owen. We are a tiny non-governmental organisation that protects more rainforests than any other NGO, whatever its size. When we go to the Department for International Development, we are told that we cannot have any money because we ask for too little. Will the Secretary of State put a rocket up DFID?

Michael Gove >

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A rocket might require too much fossil fuel to have the desired effect. The right hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, however. We work collectively across the Government. On the morning of 7 May, I will be meeting the Secretaries of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and for International Development and the Foreign Secretary to raise that issue.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I want to be fair to Scottish National party colleagues, so I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil).

Angus Brendan MacNeil >

(Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

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I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He is slowly signing up to the talk of a climate emergency. In my constituency, the UK's carbon footprint could be given major help by the inclusion of a 600 MW interconnector to the mainland from the best wind resource in Europe. At the moment, Ofgem is talking about a 450 MW interconnector, but for 4p more for the average bill payer, we could do a lot for the UK's carbon footprint. Will he stamp on Ofgem and make sure that, when it talks about consumer concerns, it is talking about consumers' environment rather than a tawdry 4p on bills?

Michael Gove >

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That is a fair point, effectively made. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is ultimately a decision for National Grid—*[Interruption]*—and Ofgem; forgive me. We should all take account of the fact that Scotland has contributed to the significant growth in renewables across the United Kingdom. Offshore wind and solar have grown over the past seven years. Yes, that has been led by a Conservative Government—or a coalition Government, for some of the time—in London, but the Scottish Government have played their part.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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In that spirit, I am very happy to give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald).

Stewart Malcolm McDonald >

(Glasgow South) (SNP)

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I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene. I want to take him back to security. There are many teeth in the dangerous maw that is climate change, and security does not get enough attention. Between DFID, the Ministry of Defence and perhaps the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will the Government at some point publish an analysis of how the global security effects of climate change affect the UK, and what part the UK sees itself playing?

Michael Gove >

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That is a fair point, and I will take it forward. In advance of our preparations for COP 26 at the end of 2020, I will ensure that we include in our deliberations the dimension of security, which I know is close to the hon. Gentleman's heart.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I must allow my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park to intervene, after which I will take an intervention from the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) and then make some progress.

Zac Goldsmith >

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Does my right hon. Friend agree that part of any new deal for nature—it has been much discussed, and I hope it will be discussed again today—should be a significant shift in DFID's spending such that a much greater proportion of its money is spent on protecting and restoring the natural world, as a means of preventing base poverty and alleviating poverty?

Michael Gove >

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I could not agree more, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development believes that as well. One of the best ways to safeguard the environment is to support people towards sustainable growth. Projects such as the Darwin initiative have shown the way in making sure that we can provide people with dignity and the chance to flourish economically, while at the same time safeguarding and enhancing valuable habitats.

Anna McMorrin >

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The Secretary of State speaks with his characteristically warm words, but words are not followed by action across the Government. Subsidies are being cut from onshore wind and solar, while VAT on solar has been increased. We need to see real action across every single Department and a responsibility on every single Minister to cut carbon.

Michael Gove >

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I absolutely agree that we need action. I thank the hon. Lady for her work, because before she joined us in the House, she played a distinguished role in Welsh politics, making sure that the environment was at the heart of the agenda for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I have taken some interventions and I will take some more, but first I want to make some points, particularly in response to the hon. Lady's question. She asked about action, and that is legitimate. Let me be clear: in the UK, since 2010, we have decarbonised our economy faster than any other G20 nation; between 2010 and 2018, we reduced greenhouse gas emissions in this country by 25%; UK CO₂ emissions have fallen for six years in a row, which is the longest period on record; and the UK's renewable energy capacity has

quadrupled since 2010. The proportion of UK electricity that comes from low-carbon sources increased from 19% in 2010 to almost 53% in 2018, which meant that 2018 was a record year for renewable energy; over the past year, we have generated record levels of solar and offshore wind energy; and annual support from the Government for renewables will be more than £10 billion by 2021. All that has come as a direct result of a shared ambition, with a Government who set stretching targets and are prepared to intervene where necessary, but who recognise that we need the ingenuity and enterprise of the private sector working in partnership with the Government to deliver change.

I stress that safeguarding our environment must not come at the cost of ending economic growth, because economic growth is vital to spur the innovation and secure the investment to make sure that we have the technological breakthroughs that can safeguard our environment. Since 1990, under Governments of different parties, we have seen a 40% overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and we have also seen a two-thirds increase in growth. If we think in particular about the significant growth in renewables, of course solar energy initially needed subsidy to kick-start it, but as solar energy costs have diminished, so the need for subsidy is, as any economist would tell the House, lesser. This is no criticism of any previous Government, but when we came into power, only 38.3 MW of power in this country was generated by solar; now, the amount is 13,000 MW, which is 13 GW. That is a 99% increase in solar power generation under Conservative Ministers.

Now, is there more to do? I do not deny that there is more to do. Should we be more ambitious? We have to be more ambitious. The story is sometimes told of the past nine years as nine years in which we allowed the grass to grow under our feet; no, we allowed a thousand flowers to flourish to ensure that our environment was safeguarded.

Sir Edward Leigh >

(Gainsborough) (Con)

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I am sorry to make a Thatcherite point—I know Thatcherism does not go down very well nowadays—but will my right hon. Friend confirm that the best way to reduce emissions is to have a vigorous, free-enterprise, low-tax, deregulated economy, and that the countries with the worst records are socialist command economies, particularly in eastern Europe?

Michael Gove >

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My right hon. Friend makes a good point. It is no coincidence that it was Margaret Thatcher, a scientist and a free-marketeer, who was the first to raise the alarm on climate change, and it is no coincidence that the record of environmental devastation in the eastern bloc when we had command-and-control economies shamed the world.

This is not a party political point; it is merely an observation that the command-and-control economy in Venezuela has not only beggared its own people and made profligate use of hydrocarbons in a way that has led to environmental degradation, but socialism has trumped the environment as a cause, so their contribution to animal welfare has been having to open a zoo to allow people to eat the wild animals. The truth is that the fundamentalist socialism that we have seen in Venezuela and the heedless selfishness exhibited by some other political leaders in other parts of the world are twin dangers. We need to face them down. Whether it is Bolsonaro in Brazil or Maduro in Venezuela, we need to say to those who do not put their people and their environment first, “We’re on your case. Free markets, free individuals and an Earth free of pollution are what people deserve.”

Mr Shailesh Vara >

(North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)

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Earlier, my right hon. Friend referred to the wonderful work that the UK is doing on the environment, and he has just mentioned other countries. Will he tell the House a bit about what pressure we are putting on other countries to play their part, because this really has to be a global effort?

Michael Gove >

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I hope I might have the opportunity to make it clear to the President of the United States when he comes here, perhaps over dinner—I will probably opt for a meat-free option on that evening—that as the world’s biggest polluter, he has to take responsibility. When it comes to the environment, I am ideologically colour blind: whether people come from blue states or red states, or from blue parties or red parties, the key question is, “Are you acting?” If they are acting, I will applaud.

David Linden >
(Glasgow East) (SNP)

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I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way to a Member from the yellow party. He has spoken at length about his environmental credentials and what the Government are doing on the environment, but will he tell me why the Government are not supporting my Nappies (Environmental Standards) Bill?

Michael Gove >

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I have had the opportunity to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss his Bill, and we are looking into whether we can use the extended producer responsibility scheme to cover the initiative that he asks about. I am grateful to him for raising that point, because his proposed legislation draws attention to a defect, but I am not sure that it is absolutely quite right. I am happy to work with him to bring about change.

Huw Merriman >
(Bexhill and Battle) (Con)

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The Secretary of State has talked about flowers and about honey; does he agree that although we talk a good game in Parliament, the parliamentary estate is an appalling environment for our pollinators? Through him, may I invite every MP present to join me in two weeks at the all-party group on bees and pollinators, where we are going to see a mock-up of what it would be like if we turned Cromwell Green into a wild-flower meadow and hosted a beehive that MPs could manage, thereby doing more than just talking?

Michael Gove >

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I absolutely agree. Of course, at DEFRA we have a beehive on our roof. Everyone can play their part.

Dr Caroline Johnson >
(Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend has been making points about national and international leadership, but we can all do more, including local councils. He will be aware that Conservative councils recycle or reduce waste by more than twice as much as Labour councils. Will he congratulate in particular North Kesteven District Council in my constituency, which has reduced its carbon footprint by almost 70% in the past 10 years?

Michael Gove >

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My hon. Friend makes a good point—

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I will not give way for another few minutes.

I am happy to congratulate North Kesteven District Council on its exemplary leadership. Of course, at local government level throughout the country there are leaders from all parties—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order. Although he is speaking quite audibly, I cannot hear the Secretary of State because there is so much noise. I thought people wanted to hear his answers to their questions.

Michael Gove >

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I am grateful for your help, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will give way again, but not for a few moments.

I wish to place on record my thanks to everyone in local government who contributes to improving recycling. We still need to do much more, which is why in the forthcoming environment Bill we will put into effect some of the changes that our waste and resources strategy talks about, to ensure that we have uniform levels of recycling throughout the country and that we extend the extended producer responsibility scheme. It is a fact that overall, pound for pound, kilo for kilo, Conservative councils have a better recycling record than Labour councils, but I am more than happy to acknowledge—

Marsha De Cordova >

(Battersea) (Lab)

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Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove >

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No.

I am more than happy to acknowledge that there are individual Labour councils that do well and from which we can learn.

I said that we need to do more as a nation, which is why I am looking forward to the publication tomorrow of the report by the Committee on Climate Change, which was originally established by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). The programme of carbon budgets that the committee has set has enabled us to make significant progress so far in the meeting of our obligations to the earth, but we all know that we need to do more.

Last October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it clear that the Paris target of a 2°C temperature rise was, as the science showed, not ambitious enough and that we need to ensure that we slow the rate of greenhouse gas emissions and hopefully achieve net zero in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. After that IPCC report, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Business, immediately commissioned the Climate Change Committee to tell us what we as a Government and as a society should do to meet that target. That level of ambition was endorsed by a range of different organisations, from the NFU, which says that we should try to have net zero in agriculture by 2040, to companies such as Tesco, our biggest single retailer, which have also committed to the net zero target. That is why I am delighted that, today, the Leader of the Opposition has also joined this Government, the NFU and Tesco in committing to net zero by 2050. As they say, every little helps.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove >

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I will not give way for a second.

One thing I want to emphasise is that actions and a higher level of ambitions count, but when people across this House say that this situation is an emergency, we need to look at the record. I am very happy for our record to be looked at and for criticisms to be made. Since I became Environment Secretary nearly two years ago, the Leader of the Opposition has not used a single Opposition Day to debate climate change or the environment until today. He has not asked a single question—not one—of the Prime Minister about climate change or the environment, despite more than 400 opportunities to do so. When climate change protesters went to his own home in order, literally, to bring home the scale of the challenge that we face, he was not able to stop and talk to them on that occasion. The point that I make is not that we should doubt the sincerity of the right hon. Gentleman, but rather that if we believe that this is an emergency, as one of my colleagues pointed out earlier, we should not try to say that any one party in this House has a monopoly of virtue. Let us try to ensure that we have a civilised debate that combines a sense of urgency about the challenge in front of us and a determination to take action in the future. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order! This is like a primary school class—I am sorry I mean no insult to primary school children. Is the Secretary of State taking an intervention?

Michael Gove >

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indicated assent.

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

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As we are talking about cross-party consensus, let me say that things are moving very fast in this debate. Whatever has been said about fracking in the past, it is not a transition fuel, but a fossil fuel. We should stop any new investment in any new technology that is based on fossil fuel. We must stop it. Will his Government finally commit to stop their support of fracking?

Michael Gove >

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I completely understand where the hon. Lady is coming from, but one thing that we all must acknowledge is that, as we strive to meet more ambitious targets for emissions, hydrocarbons will be part of that mix. To be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, he has acknowledged that coal—high-quality coal—can be part of the mix when it comes to, for example, steel production. There is a legitimate argument across this House about the pace at which we should reduce our reliance on coal, and no Government have gone faster to reduce our reliance on coal, the single most polluting hydrocarbon than this Government. When it comes to other hydrocarbons, in the mix, we know—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but we have been told that we should listen to the science. We know that gas is a less polluting hydrocarbon. If we can move from coal to gas, then, overall, we reduce the level of pollution. Ultimately, we want to move as fast as possible to incentivising and generating more of our energy from renewables, which is what we have done.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove >

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I will not give way.

The key thing that everyone across this House has to recognise—and to be fair to the Leader of the Opposition, he has recognised it—is that if we want to make progress and we want to have a higher level of ambition, we need to be realistic about what those trade-offs are, and we need to ensure that, where appropriate, gas can be part of the energy mix. It is a diminishing part, but it will be a part for the foreseeable future.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I am not giving way at the moment.

It is also important, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, that we not only take action on energy, decarbonise our economy and recognise the global challenge that climate change presents, but do everything we can in our own country to adapt and to mitigate the effects of climate change. That is why this Government are committed to the planting of 11 million new trees. That is why the Countryside Stewardship and Woodland Carbon Fund has been created—to ensure that we reforest this country, which, as the right hon. Gentleman fairly pointed out, is one of the least forested in Europe.

Andrew Griffiths >

(Burton) (Con)

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Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Michael Gove >

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I will not give way at this stage.

We are lucky in this country to have a concentration of blanket bog and peatland, one of the most effective carbon stores in the world, and this Government are committed to restoring more than 6,000 hectares of peatland to a state where they can play their role in acting as a carbon sink. All of these steps are part of the 25-year environment plan, which is intended to ensure that, for the first time, we hand on to the next generation a restored environment. I am talking about more trees planted, more habitats restored to good or better status, more investment in clean air and water and, above all, more investment in making sure that the organic content of our soil is improved—a critical measure not just in improving fertility for future food production, but for dealing with carbon.

Rebecca Pow >

(Taunton Deane) (Con)

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The Secretary of State could not avoid giving way on the subject of soil. It saddens me—and I agree with what was said earlier—that this issue is being made into some kind of political football. It has been about not only the words, but, as he has demonstrated, the policies. Getting the policies right is the game changer. One of our game-changing policies is our clean growth strategy. Does he agree that that is the direction in which we have to go to really change minds and industry?

Michael Gove >

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There are few people who are more passionate about the environment than my hon. Friend, and she is absolutely right. The clean growth strategy shows, as we discussed earlier, how we can combine the decarbonisation of our economy with the creation of new jobs. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs in our country that are part of clean energy generation and carbon capture, and that is the way to go.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do want to take a number of interventions to ensure that Members across the House can make their points, but then I shall not take any more, because this debate is heavily oversubscribed and I want everyone to have the chance to speak. On that basis—and I will seek to be quick—I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston).

Nigel Huddleston >

(Mid Worcestershire) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend has mentioned several times the importance of handing on to future generations. To that end, is he as impressed as I am, when we go round schools in our constituencies, at the level of concern and awareness about environmental issues and climate change? Can we praise all those who have helped to educate our young children to be aware of these issues, including some TV programme makers, who play a part in educating our young people?

Michael Gove >

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I absolutely agree. The role of many broadcasters, not least the BBC, has been inspirational. On Friday, I enjoyed the opportunity to visit Tytherington School in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), where an incredibly impressive group of year 8 and year 9 children showed how they are combining enterprise by operating their own new company and making sure that recycling and renewables are at the heart of economic growth.

Tracy Brabin >

(Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)

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The right hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about leadership. Will he celebrate with me the Labour council of Kirklees, which, in January, had already declared a climate change emergency? Does he agree that, as we have so much consensus, we could declare an emergency today and all go back to our constituencies and start campaigning? We cannot be on the wrong side of history in this regard.

Michael Gove >

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I agree with the hon. Lady that a high level of ambition on the part of local government is absolutely right, but the key question is not whether we declare an emergency—that is only one part of it—but whether we act. It is actions, not words, that count. Throughout this debate—I applaud the Leader of the Opposition for calling it—we have heard again and again about the series of actions being

undertaken by this Government and about the series of actions that we intend to undertake, which show how seriously we are taking this. That is the real test.

Andrew Griffiths >

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I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I know that he, like me, will be celebrating Staffordshire Day today and praising the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for the work it does to protect our environment. May I draw his attention to the fact that we have just gone through the longest period of coal-free electricity production since the industrial revolution? That is action by this Government.

Michael Gove >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That happened on Easter weekend. Let me also say that the beautiful Staffordshire moorlands contain some of the peatland and heathland that is such a valuable resource in so many ways.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I will not give way to everyone—just a few more. Then I will make some progress.

Mary Creagh >

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I thank the Secretary of State for giving way, and I welcome the change in his party's policy on the forests, which—let us not forget—the Government planned to sell back in 2011. Does he share my concern that the country is currently set to miss its fourth and fifth carbon budgets? Does he also agree that the next spending review conducted by the Treasury has to set out how not just the economy but the entire Government purchasing processes and policies have to achieve net zero—that it should be a net zero spending review?

Michael Gove >

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Makes sense to me.

Neil Parish >

(Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)

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As we produce a new agriculture and environment policy, we can plant a lot of trees along banks to mitigate flooding while improving our environment and having great food at the same time. I very much welcome the policies that the Secretary of State is bringing forward.

Michael Gove >

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have to recognise the vital role that farmers and growers play—not just in providing us with food, but in ensuring that our countryside is beautiful and that we are fighting climate change. I particularly thank the leader of the National Farmers Union, Minette Batters, who has committed the NFU to having net zero agriculture by 2040. She is a fantastic champion not only for British food, but for our environment.

Chris Bryant >

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Home energy conservation is going to be vital if we are to achieve these goals. Many of the poorest households in the land unfortunately live in homes that are very difficult to insulate through traditional means. Is it not time that we introduced a new scheme that makes it possible for people like my constituents to do their bit?

Michael Gove >

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I absolutely take the hon. Gentleman’s point. We must ensure that new construction meets high standards not just in carbon emissions but in the provision of domestic heat. He is right that we need to look at retrofitting existing housing, particularly in some of the poorer areas of the country and in areas such as the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, where the case is most pressing.

Antoinette Sandbach >

(Eddisbury) (Con)

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Will the Secretary of State join me in praising the Woodland Trust for the work that it is doing on the proposed 50 million tree northern forest, and the Forestry Commission, which grows all the trees in my constituency?

Michael Gove >

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I am hugely grateful for the national forest, which has taken former industrial areas in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire and rendered them even more beautiful. The Woodland Trust has been inspirational in Cheshire and areas of the northern forest, which we are planning to develop from Liverpool to Hull. Although the Forestry Commission does not always get everything right, I am more than happy to endorse and celebrate its work in Northumberland and Cumbria.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Michael Gove >

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I can only really give way a couple more times.

Helen Goodman >

(Bishop Auckland) (Lab)

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I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He mentioned peatlands, but 80% of our peatlands are damaged, and this accounts for 10% of our carbon dioxide emissions. Will he therefore explain why the Government are only putting £6 million a year into peatland restoration?

Michael Gove >

It is actually £10 million.

Tom Tugendhat >

(Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)

I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. As he spoke about the regional aspects of the issue, may I ask him to work more closely with his colleague who is currently in the Sahel? There are areas of land, such as Vietnam, with paddy fields that are only about 1 metre above sea level. We are talking about the possible salination of agricultural area, and the consequent massive population movements caused by climate change. I very much welcome the efforts that the Secretary of State is making domestically, but how much is he doing with the embassy network around the world?

Michael Gove >

All posts recognise the vital role that the UK has to play in ensuring that we deal with environmental and climate change challenges. Whether that means ensuring that we halt deforestation in Indonesia or that we deal effectively with the challenges of climate change in Vietnam or Bangladesh, we deploy our international development money and our overseas development assistance with exactly that goal. Is there more that we can do in the future? Absolutely, but as my hon. Friend pointed out—and as the Foreign Secretary is making clear today in the Sahel—this is an area where our moral responsibility for the world's poorest, our own interest in global security and our debt to the next generation coincide.

I want to conclude simply by saying that there will be an opportunity in the environment Bill that we intend to bring before the House shortly—the first environment Bill for many years, a flagship measure—for Members across the House to work together to ensure that we have the highest standards of environmental protection. I have been grateful for the work undertaken by the Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee to ensure that the Bill is improved. I have never seen a Bill come to this House that has not benefited from scrutiny, improvement and enhancement along the way.

The way in which the Bill will mark a step change in how this country tackles the twin challenges of climate change and our broader ecological degradation is a test for us all. Will we approach it in a spirit of constructive but determined energy? Will we use that legislation to say that we will all work together, as we worked together across parties in 2008 when the Climate Change Act was introduced, to demonstrate that Britain—the country that was responsible for the first industrial revolution—is powering a new green revolution?

The responsibility rests on us all to be honest and gracious about the achievements of other parties, as I was earlier about the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Environment Minister. But it is also incumbent on us all to recognise that, if we really believe that we face an emergency and a crisis, we should do as our forefathers did when this country faced emergencies and crises in 1914 and in 1940. We put aside partisanship, we recognised the sincerity on the other side and we acknowledged that both sides had made mistakes, but we had a shared ambition to prove that Britain could lead. We have led in the past in defence of freedom. Let us lead now in defence of our planet.

Several hon. Members rose—**Madam Deputy Speaker >**

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

I think it only fair to warn hon. Members that I have indications that some 84 people wish to speak this afternoon. There will therefore be a time limit of five minutes initially, although that is likely to become three minutes later. Hon. Members might wish to reconsider their long speeches in the light of that information.

Deidre Brock >

(Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)

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May I just say that it is about bloody time? Grave warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have been ignored by too many Governments and parliamentarians for far too long. Greenwashing and tinkering have been the order of the day. We have had Prime Ministers stating that they would run the greenest Government in history and saying, “Vote blue, get green.” We have had Ministers jetting around the globe to attend summits on how to address climate change. We have had sombre words and much head-shaking as hands were wrung and crocodiles asked for their tears back. Then, last week, a 16-year-old girl came here—an extremely impressive 16-year-old girl—and she was fawned over by some people who were anxious for some reflected glory. Suddenly, people are running around trying to look worried about this issue.

I should clarify that there have always been some voices that have been raised and that have carried warnings in this place and in others for some time. There are people who warmed these Benches warning about global warming when it was less than fashionable to do so. Some were labelled cranks and crackpots, but they picked up those names and carried on, because the issue was so important. Those people have sat on Government Benches and Opposition Benches. Most will not now be remembered, and that will be okay by them. I am glad that the Secretary of State paid tribute to Roseanna Cunningham, who is now the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform in the Scottish Government. She was one such toiler. She suffered her time here as a Member in the 1990s, and she still rants about how hard she found it to get anyone to really listen to what needed to be done—not just to appear to be listening, nor to engage in a listening and engagement exercise, but actually to listen. Not that she bears a grudge.

Mike Amesbury >

(Weaver Vale) (Lab)

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Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the concrete actions that the Government could take to respond to this emergency is to ban fracking throughout the UK?

Deidre Brock >

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As the hon. Gentleman is probably aware, the Scottish Government have taken significant action on that issue, and I would very much like to see it taken across the UK as well. There is no place for fracking anywhere, in my opinion.

Roseanna Cunningham is now at the forefront of delivering on a programme to actually deliver on addressing climate change—an environmental policy that takes into account the needs of people and the need to hand on a working planet to future generations. She will tell us that she wants to do more, to deliver more and to solve all the problems and solve them now, but she knows, as do many who sit in this Chamber, that Government policy does not pivot so easily, and public attitude changes take time and effort to effect. That means that this needs the extra effort and extra attention that great changes usually need. We have to change the way we live—the way we conduct society. We have to be aware now that these changes will make life less comfortable. That is just how it is, though, and we should get on with it.

This is the one issue that might require us to put away the tools of political point-scoring and decide to work together for the survival of the species. We may not agree on the way forward, and we do not have to, but we can do that without losing sight of what we are driving at. The DEFRA Secretary—or Old Swampy, as I like to call him—and I can find ways to work together. I can offer him the benefit of vision that those of us who live in Scotland have of a Government working towards some serious and stretching targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We can chat about how the Scottish Government have put money into ensuring that there are enough charging points for electric vehicles to allow a target for phasing out petrol and diesel vehicles by 2032, and about funding electric buses and ultra low emission vehicles in the public fleet.

Alan Brown >

(Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)

On working together, I am not sure if my hon. Friend is aware that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is apparently looking at allowing onshore wind in Scotland where the Scottish Government have embraced onshore wind, yet the Scottish Secretary has put in writing to BEIS his objection to Scotland getting access to onshore wind, and now the Departments are refusing to release that correspondence. Is that not disgraceful and the very opposite of working together?

Deidre Brock >

I am indeed aware of that issue, and I do think it is disgraceful. I cannot see how the Secretary of State has a leg to stand on in this regard.

This needs ambition—not personal ambition, but political ambition and the desire to see future generations able to breathe on this planet. We need to challenge an old measure of Government success—the measure that says that the greatest good a Government can do is grow GDP—and start to measure success by how much the Government can do to ensure that there is a future where the sustainability of communities and the environment is a touchstone.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald >

Does my hon. Friend agree that for all the glossy words of the Environment Secretary, what is needed is for Departments to work together? As she knows, Dalgety Bay beach in Scotland is still covered in radioactive particles, and the Ministry of Defence has dithered and delayed on this. Does she agree that that needs to be addressed urgently; that it cannot wait until next year, as seems to be getting suggested; and that the message has to go to the Government that Scotland is not Westminster's nuclear dumping ground?

Deidre Brock >

I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. It has been three decades since radioactive particles were found on Dalgety Bay beach, and only now is the MOD finally committing itself to a clean-up of those particles. That is an utter disgrace. I would like, personally, to see an environmental audit of all MOD activities on Scottish land and water to see what that uncovers, and then, of course, the MOD paying for the clean-up operations.

We must have regard to the warning issued by the Governor of the Bank of England when he said that climate uncertainty was an economic risk and that climate challenges could become challenges in the financial markets. We have to see that, swallow it and move on. Action on climate change can be a threat to jobs, but inaction is a death knell, and not just to jobs. Mark Carney also said that there was opportunity in the changes to come, and that we should embrace that and welcome the possibility of new industries and new jobs arising from new technology.

Patricia Gibson >

(North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)

Does my hon. Friend agree that the pressure for the real, far-reaching change that we need is being brought to bear by the future generations that we are failing by not going far enough? Will she join me in congratulating the pupils of Whitehirst Park Primary School in Kilwinning, who have been working very hard to learn more about climate change?

Deidre Brock >

I certainly will. My own two daughters' knowledge of these important issues is so much greater than mine was at that age. The amount of work that is being put in on this issue by students right across the UK is phenomenal; it is very impressive indeed. I really appreciate my hon. Friend bringing that up.

Dr David Drew >

(Stroud) (Lab/Co-op)

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Like me, the hon. Lady spent many weeks in the Committee on the Agriculture Bill, which, if introduced properly, could take us forward, notwithstanding the implications of our membership of the EU. Is she rather surprised that that Bill is yet to come back to the House, months after it left Committee?

Deidre Brock >

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Yes, I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman—it has surprised me how long the Bill has taken to reach the Floor of this House again. It was an interesting time in Committee. A number of the issues did not really concern Scotland, of course, as he will be aware, but there were some big issues that were not properly addressed by the Minister at the time. It might be that the Government are grappling with the issues around food production, for example, which, as he will know, was not even in the Bill.

To return to welcoming new industries and new jobs arising from new technology, that is why the Government should be reversing decisions they made to pull funding from renewables and to cut subsidies, denying researchers the tools they need to progress these new technologies. Nova Innovation, headquartered a few hundred metres from my constituency office in Edinburgh North and Leith, has recently installed tidal arrays off Shetland, gathering power from the sea and demonstrating that the technology can be scaled up and adapted to provide a constant and consistent source of renewable energy. That was possible only because EU funding was available to drive the development of the technology. Post Brexit, none of that funding will be available, so how will the Government be stepping up to the plate? Will they be filling this hole left by our departure from the EU? Indeed, since this is a Labour motion, may I ask Opposition Front Benchers to give some concrete assurances that if they ever got into power, research into renewables would see increased support and funding—and, crucially, as referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), connections to the grid would be cheaper for renewable power generated?

Mr Jim Cunningham >

(Coventry South) (Lab)

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The hon. Lady is making a valuable contribution. On European funding for research and development, the Government will not guarantee replacing that money beyond 2020. That is a very important point. If the Government were really serious about doing something about climate change, they would step up and tell us exactly what is going to happen after 2020.

Deidre Brock >

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The hon. Gentleman is correct. This is just another example of the uncertainty that the whole situation around Brexit has caused, and the Government refuse to clarify it for the many people who are waiting to see what the grants might be.

What offers are likely to be made by any potential UK Government in the next couple of years to address the causes of climate change and climate chaos? A change of Prime Minister might offer an opportunity to change direction, but I see few signs that anyone leading on policy development in either of the two largest parties has really heard any of the warnings. Changing our society will require some discomfort, some pain and some realignment of how we live, and that is unlikely to happen immediately. For example, we still depend on fossil fuel-powered vehicles to get our food to the shops, and often even to get it to our front doors—from truck, to ship, to truck, to home delivery van. We still depend on hydrocarbons to make fertilisers. We still have an addiction to plastic that defies all understanding, and a hankering for personal transport.

People changing their cotton buds and refusing straws in pubs is not enough. The average inhabitant of these islands will join in with efforts to change the way we live, happily or otherwise, but it needs leadership from Government, proper investment in reliable renewable energy production, investment in and subsidies for low-emission public transport, a real push against plastics, and an uptick in building standards on insulation and energy-efficient heating and lighting—and not just for houses.

Sir Edward Davey >

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I agree with everything the hon. Lady is saying, but will she share her thoughts on how we manage the oil and gas industry in the UK over the next two or three decades?

Deidre Brock >

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Absolutely. I would suggest something along the lines of the Scottish Government's £12 million transition training fund, which was launched in 2016. The fund enables people who are in the oil and gas industry—about 240,000 jobs across the UK depend on it—to train and perhaps progress into the renewables industry. That is certainly something I would like to see.

Alan Brown >

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Further to that point, does my hon. Friend agree that the oil and gas industry could also be supported by implementing carbon capture and storage, which allows a low-carbon transition? That is where the UK Government are sadly lacking, having pulled the £1 billion funding. That is where we need to go, and it could make use of the decommissioned oilfields.

Deidre Brock >

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Absolutely. That is a crucial element. Unfortunately, as the National Audit Office told us, the two competitions on CCS were cancelled at a cost of some £140 million, and that needs to be looked at properly again. At the moment, there is a £20 million prize fund on CCS, but it is simply not sufficient.

This requires a change of Government—not a change of personnel; there is no point changing the hand on the rudder if the course is still towards the rocks—and a change in attitude, ambition and direction of travel. It requires change across every Department and every ministerial portfolio. It needs Government to engage with the people and civic society, and to drive this agenda forward. In spite of the couthie words often chuntered here about saving the planet, there has not been much evidence of action. This is one small corner of the world, and it cannot change global politics on its own, no matter what strange dreams Brexiters have. We have a duty and a moral obligation to do our bit to keep this world fit to hand on to the next generation, and it is about time we bucked up our ideas.

🕒 3.22pm

Sarah Newton >

(Truro and Falmouth) (Con)

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This debate really matters. It matters to the hundreds of thousands of people across our great nation and the world. This is the mother of all Parliaments. This is the country that had the first industrial revolution. It is our moral responsibility to come together as a Parliament and show the leadership that people across the world rightly expect of us. We today should be building on the radical political consensus that was achieved back in 2008, which brought all parties in the House together and gave any Minister standing at the Dispatch Box legally binding targets on reducing emissions.

I am confident, given the actions taken, that this Secretary of State and this Government will respond positively, enthusiastically and responsibly to the guidance they will receive tomorrow, which will set out why we need to move to net zero carbon by 2050 or sooner. We need today to put petty political point scoring to one side, recognise what this country has achieved and share that ambition to do more and faster.

Like every other Member, I know from going around my constituency that all parts of society we represent—whether schoolchildren, members of the women's institute or the business community—are asking us to do more. They are also asking us what more they can do. This is about what not only we in this place do, but what our whole country will do—what businesses, public services and people will do. I know that people want to do the right thing, but sometimes they do not know what to do.

I want to make one simple point today, by sharing the great work of Luci Isaacson and Climate Vision in my constituency. Back in 2009, she set up a simple 10-pledge challenge. She got 10 local ambassadors in Truro to recruit a whole team of us to make simple changes in our lives over four months, and between us, we saved more than 3,000 tonnes of CO₂. It was not virtue signalling or running out and buying the most expensive new electric vehicle. It was simple things that we can all do, like switching energy provider, which saves money as well as CO₂, or eating local, in-season produce and walking more often—all sorts of practical things that save us money, make us feel better and contribute to our local economy.

I set a challenge to every Member of the House today. I know they care very much about this issue and that many of them are riding bicycles and taking all sorts of action in their communities. I ask them to go to my website, look up the work of Climate Vision and make one of those pledges or all 10 of them, so that today we can all commit to reducing our own emissions. We are all leaders in our communities, and we can support and encourage everyone who wants to play their part and make a difference. They can use #10PledgeChallenge, so that together we can send out a strong message that as individual leaders, policy makers and Members of this mother of all Parliaments, we get it, and we are stepping up to the greatest challenge that we will face in our lifetimes.

🕒 3.26pm

Edward Miliband >

(Doncaster North) (Lab)

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It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). Her eloquent words on climate change show that the Front Bench's loss is the Back Benches' gain and this House's gain.

The tone of this debate has been largely good-natured and about shared objectives, and that is important. This debate matters, and the emergency matters, because, contrary to what the Secretary of State implied, we are not doing nearly enough as a country. It is true that we have made a lot of progress in relation to the power sector, but 75% of the gains we have made overall since 2012 have been in that sector alone. The latest report of the Committee on Climate Change in 2018 says that emissions in the building sector, the agriculture sector, the waste sector and the fluorinated gases sector have been flat for a decade.

The emergency matters because it says to not only the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or other Departments—the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is also on the Front Bench—but the whole Government that this matters to everyone and that this is not just another issue we have to deal with, alongside all the other issues we face. Every issue has to go through climate change and what we do about it. It is the whole basis of our politics for generations to come. I hope that the Secretary of State will support the emergency, because it will focus minds in the Government.

I do not want to speak for long, but I do want to talk about political persuasion and in particular about how we carry the public with us on this journey. Nice words were said about me, and I am grateful to both Front Benchers for that, but the truth is that I feel a sense of guilt. I feel a sense of guilt that I have not done more on this issue and that I did not do more when I was leader of my party. I talked about the issue, but I did not do more.

It is bad thing that in the 2015 TV debate, which I do not like to recall too much, not one question was asked about climate change, and that tells us something about the fact that Brexit—it is bad enough, given how it sucks the political oxygen out of all the other issues—is not the only reason why this issue has not been more salient, or rather that it goes through peaks and troughs. I think that the reason is that this is the ultimate challenge for politics, because the decisions we make now will have impacts in generations' time, but less so today. The electoral cycle, if we are honest about it—and we respond to our voters—is five years, or perhaps less, not 20, 30 or 40 years.

I make a very quick intervention just to say that my right hon. Friend does not need to apologise, because he did write the emissions trading scheme when he was very much part of a Labour Government beforehand.

Edward Miliband >

It is nice of my hon. Friend to say so.

I want to talk about how we persuade people, and I think there are four things we need to do. First, I enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who speaks from the Front Bench for the SNP, but I slightly disagreed with one thing. She said a couple of times that we need to tell people their lives are going to be less comfortable. I slightly feel that that is saying, “I’m here from Planet Politics to say you’re going to have a less comfortable life.” I do not mean this in a trite way—I think it true that sacrifices must be made—but we should promise people something else, which is that they will have better lives if we act on climate change. I do not think that is a false promise; I think that is a genuine promise.

If we think about this idea of the green new deal, what is that about? It is about retrofitting every building in this country—house by house, street by street—in the way we did in the 1960s and 1970s when we moved from town gas to natural gas. That is tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of jobs, including for my constituents and the constituents of every Member, and it is about lower bills for people. If we think about our towns and cities, we see that it is about making them much better for walking and cycling—and, indeed, electric vehicles—cutting thousands of deaths from air pollution. My first and in a way most important point is: let us tell people not just the gloomy part of this—it is important to talk about the gloomy part—but that they can have better lives as a result. That is what we are in politics to do.

Secondly, I want to say something about the role of individuals, because I have come to believe that there is something slightly dangerous in this. Every individual has to do their bit, including we politicians, but I think there is something that makes people feel incredibly powerless if we put all the weight of responsibility on them. We are saying to people, “We’ve got this massive problem; your kids are never going to forgive you; and you’ve got to act.”

Let me give the House one statistic. In Norway last month, 60% of sales of new vehicles were electric; in Britain, it is something like 1.8%. I am sure we in this House all love the Norwegians. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear.”] Indeed. But that is not because the Norwegians are intrinsically more green than we are, but because there is a shedload of incentives to go green and buy an electric vehicle in Norway. The point is that this is about system change, not just individual change. Some of this is about decisions not necessarily that individuals are making, but what airports we commission, how we produce our power and all that. Individuals must make their contribution, but incentives matter, and we cannot place all the burden on individuals.

Thirdly, there is sacrifice—the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith. We cannot deny that there will be sacrifice, and there will be things we cannot necessarily do that we do at the moment but have to do less. Why have we failed to make some progress on this, and I am thinking back to my time as leader as well? Because I do not think that we or the green movement as a whole have thought enough about how we distribute the costs among those who bear the burden.

The reality about energy bills is that the poor pay a significantly higher proportion of their income on energy bills than the rich. As we think about the £10 billion that goes to support energy companies, which the Secretary of State talked about, we have to think about how those costs are borne through taxation as opposed to energy bills. Unless we do that, people will say, “Well, hang on. The costs are all falling on me, and I can least afford it.” We only need to look at what has happened to President Macron and the protests he has faced to realise that we cannot just say, “It’s green and therefore it’s fair.” We have to make sure that the costs are fairly distributed.

My fourth and final point is about the international angle. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is not in his place, wrote recently that Extinction Rebellion should go and protest in China, while he seemed modestly to approve of some of its aims. That misses the point: as Secretaries of State and the House know, the reality is that our moral authority comes from our being able to act. There is no way we could persuade China and India to act themselves if we were not leaders on this issue.

My experience at the not-very-successful Copenhagen summit was that China and India would listen to us because, unlike the US, we were actually acting. I cannot emphasise enough to the House the authority that our ability to act gives us. By the way, the Chinese recognise the opportunity. They are installing so much solar and wind power because they know that there is an economic advantage. The issue is particularly crucial in the next 15 to 18 months because of our hope to host COP—the conference of the parties—in 2020. That is the moment when we have to update the Paris targets. We are overshooting, even on the basis of the Paris targets. Unless that conference of the parties takes decisive action, it may well be too late.

Sir Edward Davey >

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The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on China; it is vital that people understand this. The Chinese are moving ahead very fast. He and his colleagues, and the former Foreign Secretary Lord Hague, were crucial in making sure that the Foreign Office was engaged in climate change diplomacy, persuading the Chinese that the fall in the cost of renewables, particularly solar, made them affordable and that the health benefits of reducing air pollution made them really attractive to their population. The change in the mood in China could be the change in the mood across the world. We need to learn from China, support it and make those points.

Edward Miliband >

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I agree absolutely with the former Secretary of State.

I want to finish by saying this. I reflect on our cross-party consensus in this country, which is incredibly important. It was created in part thanks to David Cameron's advocacy of the issue in the 2000s, and it is important that we maintain it. However, we should allow this: there will be different visions of how we get to the same goal. There will be a more socialist vision and a more Conservative one. Part of the grammar of politics that we have to learn is to argue while sharing the same objectives—maintain the cross-party consensus, but have discussions and arguments about how we can meet our goals.

Finally, I should say that there is a downside scenario, which is that future generations will say that we were the last generation who did not get it and we failed to act. But there is an upside, too: if we act, we can create better lives for those future generations.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order. There is now a formal time limit of five minutes.

 3.37pm

Rebecca Pow >

(Taunton Deane) (Con)

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It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), with whom I share a role in my membership of the all-party parliamentary climate change group. That is very much cross-party.

I share some of the right hon. Gentleman's frustration. I have been an environmental campaigner all my life—Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace. I used to be anti-nuclear, actually, although I am not anymore because it is low carbon. I vowed that if I ever came to Westminster, I would get involved in this agenda. Guess what? I have, and we are doing things. I am deeply frustrated about some of the misinformation peddled about the supposed lack of things we are doing.

There have been many good achievements, as the Secretary of State said, although that is not to say that there is not more to do. We have cut gas emissions by 25% and are phasing out coal-fired power stations. We have a renewables agenda and all the jobs. That is good work, but without a shadow of a doubt the degradation of the planet and the situation with climate change is very severe. We need to do more and quicker—I am not going to argue about that.

As I have said in this Chamber before, this issue is definitely bigger than Brexit. I reiterate the calls being made today for net zero emissions. I raised that in a question to the Prime Minister last week. I mean it, and I believe that our Government will absolutely mean business when we hear the advice of the Committee on Climate Change tomorrow.

All the Taunton Deane people I have met—Taunton Green Parents, the Extinction Rebellion people whom I met up here and all sorts of religious people of every shape and form—have asked me to put the environment at the top of the agenda. People care.

However, to really radically cut emissions and realistically hit the 2030 target, there has to be some really big thinking. As other Members have said, we are capable of sorting this out. It will require more of the right policies; we have good policies, but we need more of them. It will require driving societal change and investment into the right infrastructure and science, with vision, targets, market mechanisms and regulation that we check regularly to make sure it is all working. The overarching umbrella has to be sustainability. If we put sustainability over every single thing we do so that every Department comes under it, we cannot go wrong. Without sustainable soil, water, air and biodiversity, we simply cannot live. We can live for a short while, for one election period, but we cannot keep going. It is absolutely essential.

We need to line up our policies perhaps more cleverly than we are doing right now. One small example is the clean growth strategy, which I applaud. It needs to align itself much better with the prosperity fund. There is a bit of a conflict between the drive for ever more growth and productivity. We need to get sustainability in such initiatives as the prosperity fund.

I honestly think that every single person out there can share this with us. I genuinely think it is really exciting that we need to change society to solve this crisis. As the right hon. Member for Doncaster North said, it might be a bit uncomfortable but I think there will be great benefits. We will be healthier, because we will be cycling and walking, providing we put in the right framework for cycle lanes and walkways. We could have vehicle-free streets. How lovely would Taunton look if we did that? We could have prettier towns and not be breathing in fumes.

Steve Brine >

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Although today's debate was opened by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and will be closed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, does my hon. Friend agree that this issue is cross-governmental? The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has a huge role to play. At the weekend, Cycle Winchester saw hundreds of us cycling through Winchester as part of a mass cycle ride. The city of Winchester has about as much designated safe cycle way as the length of this Chamber. Local government has a huge role to play to make the change she talks about in respect of cycling.

Rebecca Pow >

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I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. Only yesterday, I went to a superb event on cycling here, hosted by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), where that exact point was made. We need to take up many of that event's recommendations. I agree that communities and local government are key, because they drive our developments and our homes. We need more eco-friendly, energy-efficient homes releasing less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, with much more energy-efficient heating systems. I had a 10-minute rule Bill not very long ago which called for better consultation in this area and to embrace technologies. We have to ask ourselves how we are going to do all this. We have the clean growth strategy. As I said earlier, science and technology will play a really important role, but we need to put more capital in and we need a plan for raising capital to invest in the future technologies that we need to introduce at pace.

On the wider environment, we have such an opportunity to change our land use: the way we use our land and the demands we make on it; the natural capital impact approach; paying for public services and goods, so we plant more trees and have better soil management that holds and captures carbon, and helps to control flooding. All of those issues are important and we have the opportunity, if we can get it right, with the 25-year plan, the Agriculture Bill and the forthcoming environment Bill. This is a very exciting opportunity, but we have to get it right.

On transport, I am the chairman of the all-party group on electric and automated vehicles. This will be a big, growing and important agenda. I think the Committee on Climate Change will set us even stricter targets on getting rid of diesel and petrol cars, so we have to get the infrastructure in place right now. We have to get the issue of storage sorted out, because it will be so important going forward. I have not mentioned carbon capture, but it could be a really big part of this agenda if we invest in it correctly.

I honestly believe that this could be the new green revolution and I am pleased to be a part of it. We should all be a part of it. I know we will and I look forward to the announcement from the Committee on Climate Change.

🕒 3.43pm

Cat Smith >

(Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)

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Last year's IPCC report could not have been any clearer: we have just 12 years to take real action. That is not 12 years to debate whether we need to take action, but 12 years to implement policies that dramatically cut down on our carbon emissions and change how we, as individuals, live our lives. That needs to start today. It may not be fashionable these days, but we need to heed the advice of experts. Dr Dmitry Yumashev of Lancaster University recently published research showing the potential \$70 trillion cost if we fail to take action and meet our targets. We simply cannot afford—financially or otherwise—to continue down the same route we have been on.

I will talk briefly about young people. I am proud that the Labour-led Lancaster City Council has already declared a climate emergency; it was one of the first councils to do so. That was led by our young activists across the Lancaster district, and I pay tribute to Councillor Amara Betts-Patel, Councillor Oliver Robinson, Peter Curphey, Haddi Malik and Dan Chester, to name but a few of the young people calling on their council to do more and to put forward bold policies to tackle this crisis. The onus is now on us in the House to listen to the words of young activists up and down the country and globally and to put climate change at the forefront of everything that we do.

It is clear that we need to do more on how we travel about our communities. We need to make the switch to public transport, but in Fleetwood it could not be more evident how far away we are from having a sustainable transport policy. Every morning, hundreds of my constituents get into their cars and drive down the A585 to access jobs and education. If they were given a reliable, low-carbon alternative, I know that many would ditch their cars and jump on public transport, so the Government really need to get serious about investing in sustainable transport for communities such as Fleetwood, so that people can make that switch. That means urgently rebalancing our transport spending towards communities such as Fleetwood and to the north-west of England, bringing back into use disused rail lines that were cut by Beeching and making sure that people have the chance to use greener alternatives to cars.

Harnessing the power of wind and water has huge potential to transform Lancashire into a true energy coast. Hydro, wind, and solar energy industries have the potential to provide thousands of skilled, highly paid jobs, which will transform employment prospects for our young people while providing for our energy needs. The beginnings of this green economy are already visible in Fleetwood: I recently visited 4Navitas, which builds vertical-axis wind turbines and which was set up and is run by Fleetwood entrepreneurs Paul Cook and Marcus Stefani. Other Fleetwood entrepreneurs have been pursuing plans to construct a hydro barrage across the River Wyre, which again has huge potential to transform the town.

Sadly, the Government continue to ignore the potential of this new green economy and persevere with damaging and unwanted policies, such as fracking. The people of Lancashire said no to fracking. It is not compatible with meeting our climate change objectives, and it is time that the Government woke up and banned fracking in this country, as the Labour party has proposed.

The Government need to lead the charge for a sustainable future, but that does not mean that individuals and communities cannot take a stand. I was pleased to support the Extinction Rebellion activists in Lancaster last week, who were demonstrating about the need to change the way we live our lives and standing up for a green future. Part of that future needs to involve making sustainable choices about how we live and what we eat. Most scientists now agree that we need to eat significantly less meat to tackle climate change, and we need to recognise the real damage that intensively farmed meat has on the ecosystems of developing nations.

I believe that only a Labour Government who place the environment at the front and centre of Government policy and usher in this green industrial revolution will succeed in halting the slide to environmental chaos. Future generations will not forgive us if we do not take this opportunity for positive action. We owe it to our children to seize this opportunity and to vote today to declare a climate

emergency.

🕒 3.48pm

Mr Philip Dunne >

(Ludlow) (Con)

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I am grateful for your calling me early, Madam Deputy Speaker, and for being able to contribute—albeit briefly—to the debate. I start by agreeing with the Leader of the Opposition; he was right to call for consensus on tackling climate change. I also thought it entirely appropriate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs clearly showed the cross-party support for delivering on the UK's ambition and global leadership in this area, as well as pointing out how far the UK is delivering on this agenda. We need to introduce some balance into this debate, and I am pleased that both did so. I join others—on both sides of the House—in suggesting that we should proceed with efforts for London to host next year's climate change conference. I very much hope that it does.

I am a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and as such have the opportunity to review the Committee on Climate Change's and activists' claims and challenges, as well as to hold the Government to account on the delivery of the sustainable development goals and their climate change priorities. I was pleased therefore to support my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) when he yesterday introduced his 10-minute rule Bill, which was very well supported by Conservative Members. It is absolutely right that the House seek to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, and this in itself will require facing up to many significant challenges—some have already been mentioned, I am sure others will be—on land use, transport, energy sources, energy efficiency, joining up Government policy and showing international leadership to share the burden across the globe.

Taking that further and faster, however, as some have called for, would increase the challenge. As a farmer, I join the Secretary of State in applauding the NFU for accepting a net zero emissions challenge for agriculture by 2040. This will require very significant changes to land use, as has been graphically highlighted by the “Zero Carbon Britain” report from the Centre for Alternative Technology, which shows that diversifying land use is required across most of what we currently do today. We would need to double the land used for food for human beings in this country; to dramatically reduce the grassland for livestock; to double the forested area to a quarter of the entire UK; and substantially to increase the areas for biomass and renewable energy.

Richard Graham >

(Gloucester) (Con)

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My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. On reforestation, did he share my enthusiasm for the Secretary of State's remarks today about planting 11 million trees across the country? Could this not fire up schools' imagination? We could get them to do much more of this and maybe have an award for the best primary schools locally to follow through on this agenda of reforestation.

Mr Dunne >

↩ [Share](#)

That is well worth doing—we should encourage younger generations to recognise the power that trees have in capturing carbon—but 11 million trees goes nowhere near what would be required to get to net zero. It is a step in the right direction but only a single step.

Brexit and leaving the common agricultural policy provide the UK with a unique opportunity to take a lead, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing through the Agriculture Bill, in developing a new system of support to encourage such change in land use. While it will not be easy, it is absolutely right that we take full advantage of this opportunity.

We have heard much about the problems and challenges of meeting these targets but very few solutions offered yet in this debate, so I would like to highlight two. Innovation and maturing technology will create opportunities and solutions and drive down costs—as we have seen, solar costs have declined by 35% in the last three years alone—but a balance of technologies will be required; there will be no simple single solution.

There has been considerable focus—my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned it earlier—on the switch to electric vehicles, but this will pose very significant generation challenges. One example provided to me recently suggests that one motorway service station replacing 20 petrol and diesel pumps with 120 electric superchargers—the number needed to fuel the same number of vehicles in an hour—would require a 14.5 MW substation, which is equivalent to the electricity required for 32,000 homes. This is, then, unlikely to be the simple solution that some of us hope for, so I would like to make a quick plug for hydrogen fuel cell generation, which can become cheaper than batteries and is being pioneered by a small company, Riversimple, which was started in my constituency. It has the added benefit of reducing reliance on cobalt, which is required for batteries and is itself a finite resource.

The second solution is for changing attitudes and behaviour in an area of UK global strength—it is something I have taken a particular interest in on the EAC: the UK's leadership role on emerging green finance initiatives. This was set out in our Committee report last year, "Greening Finance: embedding sustainability in financial decision making". Climate risk reporting by companies and pension funds will make clear the financial implications of ignoring climate change and provides an opportunity for the UK to show global leadership.

🕒 3.54pm

Jeff Smith >

(Manchester, Withington) (Lab)

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It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne). I agree with him that we should consider the possibility of using hydrogen in our fuel networks, which could be an interesting development.

I last had the opportunity to speak about this issue in February, when we had our first debate on climate change in the main Chamber for two years. It was only a short Back-Bench debate on net zero emissions, and it remains disappointing that Back Benchers and the Labour party rather than the Government are instigating debates on this crucial issue. I spoke then about the devastating changes that I had seen in the Great Barrier Reef between my visits, the first 25 years ago and the second just a couple of years ago. I congratulated the organisers of the Glastonbury festival on their decision to ban plastic bottles—in passing, I encourage other festival organisers to do the same—and I talked about giving up my car and trying to rely on public transport and cycling.

Given the limited time available, I will not repeat those remarks, but I am pleased to support Labour's challenge to the Government to declare an environment and climate emergency. Such a declaration would convey the gravity of where we are with climate change. It would constitute a recognition that we are now left with a limited window of time in which to mitigate the worst of the damage that we have done—the Leader of the Opposition described the scale of the crisis comprehensively in his opening speech—and an invitation to other Governments to do the same. No other Government have declared a climate emergency, and doing so would make the UK a world leader, just as the last Labour Government led the world in passing the first binding climate change Act. It would also send a signal to the Extinction Rebellion protesters, the striking schoolchildren and the young people I speak to in schools in my constituency that we are listening and will act with urgency—for it is urgent action that we need.

Acting in the context of a climate emergency means setting ambitious goals and achieving them with commitment and motivation. What is happening now in Manchester is a good example of the action that can be taken at local level by those who are serious about their green ambitions. Last year Manchester held its first green summit and launched the first city region-wide plan to eliminate single-use plastics. Just over a month ago it held a second summit, focusing on the five-year environment plan.

Greater Manchester generates roughly 3.6% of our total UK carbon dioxide emissions, and we have acknowledged our responsibility to make our contribution to meeting targets. Ours is a cross-cutting approach that recognises and demonstrates the range of actions that we need to take. Manchester has looked into how to reduce CO₂ emissions and improve air quality as part of its transport plan. There are plans for new building developments to be zero carbon by 2028 and for existing housing to be retrofitted to increase efficiency, which is a big economic opportunity, and extensive plans to create clean air zones and tackle nitrogen dioxide exceedances. That is all part of our aim to make Manchester a carbon-neutral city by 2038, which is a suitably ambitious goal for the city that started the first industrial revolution and needs to be a leader in the next—the green industrial revolution.

I do not have enough time, but I would love to be able to say more about the importance of climate change as a social justice issue. It disproportionately affects the most marginalised members of society—it is often the poorest families who live in urban areas with high levels of pollution—but the biggest injustice of all is the fact that poorer countries that have contributed less to global warming are being disproportionately hit by its effects. The lives of people living in the global south are already being torn apart because of

the actions that we have taken in the past. The United Kingdom has a moral obligation to set and reach ambitious carbon emissions targets, not just for the sake of our people's health and environment, but to offset our global contribution. As a wealthy nation, we must also offer financial support for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts by countries in the global south that are affected by extreme weather events.

I regularly visit local schools, and, overwhelmingly, young people want to raise two issues: climate change and plastic pollution. When I speak to those young people, I say that we must all accept our responsibility to play our part, whether by eating less meat, reducing the number of car and plane journeys or avoiding single-use plastics. However, we must also match that individual ambition with legislation. We must tackle this issue as a nation. We urgently need legislation to update the Climate Change Act.

There are many other actions that we need to take, which have been outlined by other Members. As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), we have a massive opportunity. Let us declare an environment and climate emergency today, and let that declaration be a spur for those actions.

🕒 3.59pm

George Freeman >

(Mid Norfolk) (Con)

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I welcome this debate, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and all who have spoken today in the spirit of cross-party urgency.

I welcome, too, the chance to highlight the importance of this issue at the heart of this Government and the urgency of us all working together—across party, across generations and across these Houses—in the interests of the next generation, who in much of our politics feel pretty dispossessed at present. Secondly, I want to highlight the importance of innovation, science and good business and insist that we do not pursue this in an anti-business spirit but instead harness the power of the market to help us solve these problems. Thirdly, I want to insist—not in any spirit of partisanship but merely to contribute to the debate going on on this side of the House for the heart and soul of conservatism, a debate similar to that on the Opposition side of the House—that good environmental stewardship and policy is central to good one-nation conservatism.

Before coming to this House I was lucky enough to have a career in the field of science and innovation, founding and financing companies with incredibly exciting solutions to some of the great, grand challenges we face, mainly in the field of medical, clean tech and agri-tech, and as an MP I have been lucky enough to work in the Department of Energy and Climate Change and as Life Sciences Minister. It is important that we all agree that there is an environmental emergency in the world, and that we send the message that we get it. It is also important that we admit that this is very complex and that, as the great David Attenborough himself put it to me, we should be every bit as worried about biodiversity and the damage to habitats around the world as about the impact of climate change and the importance of mitigating it. The truth is this problem is being driven across the world by massive industrialisation, deforestation and urbanisation, and those seeing their life chances transformed by the agricultural and industrial revolutions driving those changes do not want us in the west to hold back their prosperity; instead they want us to reach out and help them deliver a model of clean green growth.

I absolutely agree with those who suggested this should also be at the heart of our DFID strategy. I would like a much more muscular alignment of our aid, trade and security, including our biosecurity, because economic resilience is key to prosperity around the world.

Secondly, on science and innovation, I want to pay tribute to some of those who have not just jumped on the bandwagon but have spent their careers in science trying to develop the science behind this important debate. I am thinking of those at the British Antarctic Survey, the scientists I have been lucky enough to meet and work with at Cambridge and the University of East Anglia, and those who have been working on battery technology, which holds the key to unlocking the power of electricity and electric sustainable power. I am thinking, too, of those in agri-tech; I was lucky enough to launch the agri-tech strategy, and incredible work is going on to reduce plastics, water and soil impact in modern farming. I am thinking of those in the automotive and aerospace industries; I recently visited Lotus in Norfolk, which has developed a Formula 1 car powered by biofuel, made by genetically modified bugs breaking down agricultural waste. This is great science holding great potential for our green economy. Indeed, the aerospace industry is currently embarked on taking 400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide out of its footprint. Let us not criticise those on the cutting edge of trying to develop the technologies, and let us neither be complacent.

Thirdly, on the Conservative party's track record and legacy, may I support the Secretary of State in his work and remind him and my colleagues on this side of the House that it was this party that led the first Clean Air Acts, it was this party's leader Lady Thatcher who first put this challenge on the agenda of global leaders, and it was this party that, through its values of stewardship, conservation, incentives and responsibility and its belief in prosperity—in giving and taking responsibility and in the principle of mutuality and harnessing rewards and incentives—has used the market to drive an economics of shared values as much as of share value?

This party understands how we achieve green growth and, at the risk of going all Monty Python on you, Mr Speaker, and asking “What have the Conservatives ever done for the environment?” let me say that this year we have reached a high in renewable energy, we are reducing emissions faster than any other G20 nation, and we have put £92 billion into clean energy and created 400,000 jobs. I do not mean to be complacent for a moment but let us inspire the next generation by resisting tribal politics, being led by science and being inspired by what innovation can achieve.

🕒 4.04pm

Ruth Jones >

(Newport West) (Lab)

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Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a great honour to be able to make my maiden speech during this debate on climate change. This topic is very close to my heart, and I am so pleased to see the importance that is being attached to it here in this House. I stand here today as the newest Member of Parliament, representing my home constituency of Newport West. I feel very proud and privileged to be able to do this, but of course, as colleagues across the House know, I am only here because of the sad passing of my honourable predecessor, Paul Flynn.

Paul was so well known and admired here in this House, but also in Newport West. During the by-election campaign, there would be someone in virtually every street in which we knocked who told us of how Paul had helped them or a member of their family. He was so well known, so respected and so loved by everyone in Newport West. Here in Westminster, fellow Members have taken the time to tell me stories of Paul and what a great man he was. We all know how intelligent and quick-witted he was, but he was also very kind and considerate. I only knew him for the last 15 years or so—hon. Members in this House have known him much longer—but he always took the time to talk to me and others in Newport and, just as importantly, he listened to what people said to him. His sense of humour was legendary and his ability to use a one-line response to close a debate was something to witness.

Paul is one of the main reasons I am here. He inspired people to go further than they thought possible. I will always be indebted to him for his advice and guidance, and yes, of course I have a copy of his book “How to be an MP”, and I am proud that Paul signed it for me. Paul was one of a kind. He had such a great intellect and an ability to speak on a vast range of subjects. I may not have his parliamentary experience, but I will strive to match his qualities. I will maintain an independence of thought and I will be a socialist to my dying day. I want to champion the people of Newport West and make sure their voices are heard clearly here in this House.

Newport West is a relatively new constituency, having been formed only in 1983. Paul was the second Member and he was here for 32 years. I am not sure I can promise the House that I will be here for that long, but I am proud to be the first woman Member for Newport West. I am also only the second woman Member in Gwent and the 20th female MP in Wales ever. Sisters, we are getting there—but slowly!

Newport West is a great constituency, built on the back of the industrial revolution. Initially developed as a port, it quickly developed into a town that welcomed people from all areas and countries who settled and developed their own communities within the town. It has always been a place that welcomed the stranger. Work was mainly based in heavy industrial areas such as steel manufacturing, but in recent years it has developed in high-tech areas such as Proton Partners International, the first proton beam cancer therapy treatment centre in the UK. We also have high profile facilities such as the Celtic Manor resort, which hosted the successful Ryder cup in 2010 and the NATO summit in 2014.

Newport became a city in 2002. It has continued to grow and develop, but it has maintained its sense of community and the people are friendly and welcoming. I am proud to be a Newportonian. It is a city with its own character and quirks. We hold our own with the likes of Cardiff and Bristol—*[Interruption.]* We do! We have our own identity and we relish our role as the underdog. That was well evidenced during the recent FA cup run of our very own Newport County football club, whose wins over Leicester and Middlesbrough in the third and fourth rounds were watched by thousands of us. We celebrate our successes well!

Newport is also the place where the Chartists marched in 1839 to demand democratic rights and were mown down at the bottom of Stow Hill. The bodies of those killed that day were taken and buried in secret in the grounds of St Woolos Cathedral. Members would all be most welcome to come along on 4 November when we commemorate this important event in our fight for democracy and rights for all. Newport was there, and I am proud to be a citizen of that city.

But the people of Newport West are hurting after years of austerity. The numbers of homeless people are rising, families are suffering and older people are being forced to choose between heating their homes and eating. Yes, we have record employment, but much of it involves low-paid or minimum-wage work or zero-hours contracts. Some people have to take on two jobs just to keep a roof over their head. That is not right, and I am here to speak out on behalf of those people in my constituency. They are not asking for outlandish wage increases or unrealistic improvements in their terms and conditions. They just want a fair crack of the whip. They want job security, a safe place to live, freedom from crime and the fear of crime and to know that their family members can have a good quality of life. That is not unreasonable, and I am here to help them achieve it.

I was born and brought up on the Gaer, an area of Newport West. I went to Duffryn High School, the local comprehensive, and trained as a physiotherapist in Cardiff. I spent 32 happy years in a job that was rewarding and enjoyable. I worked with people with long-term conditions, such as stroke, MS, Parkinson’s and cerebral palsy. It was a real privilege to be able to work with patients and their families to empower and enable them to reach their maximum potential, but I also had to speak out to ensure that people who were unable to speak for themselves got the care and treatment they needed. Physiotherapists are good at understanding what people need and speaking out to ensure that they get it. I plan to continue to speak out in that way in this House.

I am here today to thank my predecessor Paul Flynn for his diligent, untiring work for Newport West over 32 years. I want to pick up his mantle and carry on his good work, speaking up for the people of Newport West and the issues and difficulties they face. With God’s grace and the help of colleagues, family and friends, I will do that. Thank you.

Hon. Members

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Hear, hear!

Mr Speaker >

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Many congratulations to the hon. Lady. We look forward to hearing from her a great deal more in the future.

 4.11pm

Andrew Selous >

(South West Bedfordshire) (Con)

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May I be the second to congratulate most warmly the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) on an accomplished maiden speech? Her love of and passion for her constituency shone out in everything she said.

We have done well on climate change, because PwC reports a 42% cut in emissions since 1990, but we are all here today because we know that we must do more and that the need is urgent. Whether from younger people or from Back Benchers across the House, a challenge generally leads to better government and better results. I want to be positive and to point to five areas that are part of the solution. To be fair, the Government are involved in part in all of them, but they need to go further in some.

We have already had mention of electric vehicles and hydrogen vehicles, and I welcome the investment in battery technology and the Government’s efforts so far. However, we have heard today that Norway is far ahead of us, and 1.03 million new energy vehicles, as they are called, were sold in China in the first 11 months of last year, which is an increase of 68%, so we cannot rest on our laurels. I look forward to when ultra low emissions vehicles become more affordable so that more people can buy them.

There is one easy win in the area of transport—this would also deal with air pollution—and that is to take greater action on engine idling, something which New York has done recently with proper enforcement powers. Westminster City Council has its #DontBeIdle campaign, and we could and should do something across the UK about idling. Cycling and walking will also be part of the solution,

and I am proud to be the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary cycling group. Roughly 2% of journeys in the UK are made by bike, but the numbers for Germany and the Netherlands are around 10% and 25% respectively. We can go further, but we must mainstream cycling funding, and new roads in particular need to be cycle-friendly. We are not quite there yet.

On aviation, unbelievably, electric planes have a future. I must admit that when I first read about them I had to check that it was not 1 April, but easyJet is looking to bring out a nine-seater prototype this year. By 2027, easyJet and Ryanair are hoping to fly some commercial routes up to distances of 500 km, so aviation can have an electric future, certainly in short-haul flights, and we should welcome that.

We have heard a lot about retrofitting, but why are not all new homes being built as zero-energy-bill homes? I was privileged to welcome the British architect Bill Dunster OBE to my constituency, and he is building such homes now. Not only do they address the climate issue, but not having to pay gas and electricity bills can be critical in helping our low-income constituents to look after their families. We need to accelerate that. The Building Research Establishment in Watford has proved that the technology is there, and we should be doing much more on that front.

We have heard about the forests we are planting, with 50 million trees to be planted in the northern forests and another 11 million trees being planted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am one of probably many MPs who were privileged to send 10 trees to their constituency from the “Commonwealth canopy” scheme organised by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), and that is something we can do, too.

The subject of this debate includes the environment, about which we have not spoken much today, particularly our wildlife. I am privileged to live in a constituency in which, when I go home in the evening, I see deer, muntjacs, foxes, rabbits, pheasants, partridges, woodpeckers, goldfinches, nuthatches and many other wonderful forms of wildlife. We need to make sure they can exist, too.

My constituency also hosts Duke of Burgundy and chalk hill butterflies, and butterflies are one of the creatures most in danger from climate change. Only a very small increase in temperature can cause them difficulties.

In summary, I want a future that is green and profitable, and for which we help our poorer constituents to adapt.

🕒 4.16pm

Holly Lynch >

(Halifax) (Lab)

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On behalf of Labour Members, I pay tribute to our new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones). I have the unenviable task of following what was a truly beautiful maiden speech. I look forward to working alongside her in the months and years to come.

Like my hon. Friend, I want to speak about my constituency today. I represent one of the two constituencies that make up Calderdale, and nowhere feels extreme weather more acutely than Calderdale. The Calder Valley and Halifax constituencies experienced catastrophic flooding in the 2015 Boxing day floods, which affected 2,720 residential properties and 1,650 businesses, and we were lucky not to sustain more damage in March 2019 following a period of exceptionally heavy rainfall that pushed flood defences to the limit.

One of the most serious and immediate consequences of climate change is more frequent extreme weather events, which are a very real and terrifying prospect. One element of the response to such dangers locally that is worthy of mention has been the work of Calderdale’s “slow the flow” volunteers, whose natural flood management work across the Calder valley took the force out of the rainwater as it made its way down our steep slopes. Their work made a significant difference during the periods of greatest intensity during the March near-miss rains. Natural flood management not only contributes to a degree of protection from excess water, but does so through greater and more responsible stewardship of our natural environment.

I am pleased to say that the Labour-run Calderdale Council is already ahead of the game on climate change, having declared a climate emergency in January in response to the warning from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that there are just 12 years left to limit global warming.

Calderdale Council has succeeded in cutting its own CO₂ emissions by 35% and the borough's by 26%. Although Calderdale is on track to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40% by 2020, we know this is not enough. Further action will be needed if we are to deliver the reductions necessary to keep global temperature rises below 1.5° C.

There are another two particular pressures across Calderdale that bring this global challenge to our doorstep. The first, like in so many other parts of the country, is air quality. We have seven designated air quality management areas in Calderdale, where monitoring indicates the annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide being exceeded. The most recent figures from Public Health England show that the number of deaths from respiratory conditions is significantly higher in Calderdale compared with the national average. Although there are a number of reasons for that, poor air quality is a significant factor.

I am pleased to say that Calderdale has responded with a comprehensive air action plan, with a view to declaring Sowerby Bridge, one of our worst affected areas, a low-emissions neighbourhood. The plan prioritises the promotion of ultra low emissions vehicles and public transport, alongside walking and cycling, as well as promoting the clean-up of public transport fleets. Calderdale Council is also defending at a public inquiry its decision to reject an application to build an incinerator in the area. In the interests of air quality, I have made my views on the issue very clear.

Another initiative is the launch of the “Electric Valley” petition, building on the work of the Halifax and district rail action group electric charter, which sets out the benefits of electrification of the Calder Valley line. If we are to take vehicles off the road and ask more people to use public transport, electrification is a win-win. Not only has the Calder Valley line, which connects Manchester and Leeds through Halifax, been plagued with problems in recent months, but it is a dirty route. With electrification, we can improve the journey and clean it up at the same time. That was the top recommendation of the northern electrification taskforce “Northern Sparks” report four years ago, so I hope that the Department for Transport is watching the debate and will revisit that report.

The final threat that I want to raise is wildfire. Heatwaves have resulted in an increased frequency of wildfires on Pennine moorland. The Pennine moors, covering Kirklees, Calderdale and parts of Bradford, include sites of special scientific interest and special areas of conservation. Moorland areas are instrumental in storing CO₂—it is estimated that Britain's peat bogs store the equivalent of 10 times the country's CO₂ emissions—but when peat bogs are damaged by pollution or wildfire, they start to leak CO₂ instead of storing it. That has happened more and more often, with two blazes on Saddleworth moor in the last 18 months and a fire on Ilkley moor just two weeks ago.

It is far too easy to think that this is a problem for someone else, somewhere else, or for the next generation to solve. Calderdale Council has taken its responsibilities incredibly seriously, but it needs holistic Government support to deliver a carbon-neutral future. I hope that sharing those examples of how climate change is on our doorstep in Calderdale every single day will motivate us all to take action.

🕒 4.21pm

Sir Oliver Letwin >

(West Dorset) (Con)

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I want to make three very brief points, which I hope will not repeat anything that has been said so far. The first relates to the tone and nature of the debate. It is enormously to be welcomed that there is once again consensus across the House of Commons in favour of taking this issue very seriously.

I recall the time I first went to see, in his then role as Environment Secretary, the brother of the former leader of the Labour party. I put it to the then Environment Secretary that the Conservative party, whose policy review I was running, was prepared to move forward on a climate change Bill, and he said to me, rather memorably, that he could not see any way to prevent consensus from breaking out. It did so, and that climate change Act has protected the whole political class from a great tendency for one party to score points off the other in relation to potentially unpopular measures. As long as we can maintain that consensus, I agree with the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband)—the former Leader of the Labour party and former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change—that we may disagree from time to time about the means by which we achieve things, but we can still move forward satisfactorily.

The second point I want to make relates to the comments made by the right hon. Gentleman and by the other former Energy Secretary who has spoken, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). System change in the UK is required, and only through system change can mass effects be achieved. We should not expect people to take this on themselves individually

as a moral crusade. Some noble souls will, but the aggregate effect will be slight compared with that of system change.

System change must work with the grain of human nature. That means, for example, that in electrifying the car fleet, which is by far the greatest current shift that we can achieve, we need to solve range anxiety. The reason that people—even those who can afford to do so, and for whom such cars represent a net saving—do not buy electric cars is that they are worried about the duration for which they will be able to travel. If we ask ourselves the crucial question, “Are you willing to have a car that might not get you home from the constituency?” the answer will always be no.

There is a ready solution; Next Green Car is already setting out plans for recharging stations every 50 miles on our trunk roads, so that no one will ever be more than 50 miles from a recharging station. We are putting a huge amount of effort, as are the car manufacturers, into improving battery storage. We can solve the problem. Sustained governmental effort is required over the succeeding 18 months or so to put us in a position where we can rival Norway, and then we will start to create a virtuous circle.

As soon as those who can already afford to do so start buying electric cars in sufficient quantities, the price will fall naturally. People who are currently less able to afford such cars will then be able to do so, after which prices will fall yet further. We will thus create exactly the sort of extraordinary revolution that we have seen in information technology with the smartphone, of which there were almost none in the world 25 years ago but of which there are now literally billions, including in many impoverished countries.

That brings me to my last point, which is about the item that has not been discussed terribly much this afternoon but will obviously need an awful lot of discussion over the next few years. There are roughly 2.6 billion people living in India and China, and they are living in circumstances that make climate change particularly significant for them. This is about not just the air pollution issues that dominate in Chinese cities, but the extreme tensions relating to the use of water, for example, in the border lands between China and India. The regimes in both countries are very conscious of affairs. They are also conscious of the need to lift up those 2.6 billion people—in the case of China, to lift people out of middle-income status and into being rich, or what they call moderately prosperous, and in the case of India, to lift literally hundreds of millions of people who are still in abject poverty up to the condition of middle income, along with advancing the interests of those who already enjoy middle incomes. That will require a huge amount of additional activity and energy.

There is no way that anybody preaching from this House or anywhere else in the world is going to tell those countries that they do not have a right to lift their populations into that kind of prosperity. We in the west therefore have a solemn duty to spend our time trying to work out how we can make it easier and cheaper for those countries to achieve that goal, and to work with them to do it. That will require a substantial realignment of not only climate change policy, but our entire western foreign policy, which is of course too large a subject for me to dilate on now. Nevertheless, I hope that if we are to take this issue forward, we can do so with the seriousness that is required in our Foreign Office, and across the western world’s diplomatic establishments, and not just in Departments that are concerned with our domestic affairs.

🕒 4.26pm

Preet Kaur Gill >

(Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)

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Climate change is damaging the lives of people in the UK and abroad. We see the impact through the two recent cyclones that have struck Mozambique. A country that usually expects only one major storm every 10 years has had two in two months, with the latest, Cyclone Kenneth, the strongest cyclone ever to hit Africa.

In the UK, climate change is seen as directly responsible for the projected rise in heat-related deaths and flooding, with the poorest and most vulnerable people most likely to bear the brunt. It is a tragedy that those least responsible for climate change suffer the most. We need to act to prevent a global climate disaster, yet the Government are not doing enough.

On emissions, the Government like to talk smugly about what a good job they have done, but the Committee on Climate Change warned last year that the UK will not meet the emission reduction targets laid out in the UK’s clean growth strategy for the fourth and fifth five-year carbon budgets. On biodiversity, too, the Government are falling short, with only five of the 19 targets in the strategic plan for biodiversity set to be achieved.

The Government’s commitment to fighting climate change is enshrined in the sustainable development goals, yet according to UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development we are underperforming on 72% of the targets that are relevant to the UK, and many of those are also relevant to climate change. Take target 11.6, on reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities,

including air pollution: UK100 found that 17.9 million NHS patients in England are registered at a GP practice in an area that exceeds the World Health Organisation annual limit for PM2.5 air pollution.

The national Government clearly do not care enough about climate change, but thankfully some of our local elected officials do: Bristol and Liverpool have pledged support for the sustainable development goals; Birmingham approved a motion on the sustainable development goals in November last year; and 59 councils, more than a third of them Labour-run, have declared a climate emergency. Although those are great initiatives, local government needs more support from central Government. Local authorities need resources to invest in better, greener infrastructure, to encourage and support more people to cycle and walk safely and to promote renewables.

Stephen Doughty >

(Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op)

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My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. She has referred to what cities and authorities throughout the UK are doing; will she join me in congratulating the Welsh Government on declaring a climate emergency, and cities such as mine, Cardiff, which is doing so much work on sustainable transport, led by Councillor Huw Thomas?

Preet Kaur Gill >

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I am delighted to congratulate the Welsh Government on that.

The Government have blocked onshore wind, Britain's cheapest form of energy. According to SERA, the reintroduction of onshore wind would cut another £1.6 billion off the collective electricity bill, but rather than act, the Government have chosen to block onshore wind. Sir David Attenborough has said that climate change is humanity's

"greatest threat in thousands of years",

yet the Government keep signing up to things that they fail to deliver. I call on Members on all Benches to back Labour's motion and take the necessary action to address this threat nationally and internationally, to protect the planet and the climate for all future generations.

 4.29pm

David Duguid >

(Banff and Buchan) (Con)

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Earlier this week, I read that climate change is firmly back on the political agenda, but it has been on the agenda for decades now under different Governments. Tributes have already been paid to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who is no longer in his place, and to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), who must have left the Chamber a few seconds ago. A sense of urgency has been felt across all the parties—I will come back to the word "urgency" a little bit later in my contribution.

The task of decarbonising our economy is necessary. If we go about it in the right way, which this Government are doing, we will build a better and more secure future for generations to come. As I mentioned, I have a slight problem with the wording of this motion. I do recognise the need for urgency on this matter. I prefer the word urgency to emergency, coming to this matter as I do with 25 years' experience in the oil and gas industry. In all my time in that industry, climate change and CO₂ emissions were front and centre of how we operated. As people can imagine, the word emergency in that industry has a whole different meaning. It means to drop everything and to do something now, and it is the dropping everything part of that expression that I have a problem with.

The future of our environment is, as many have said, too important for party political point scoring. It is time for deeds, not words, and this UK Government are delivering on deeds. Those who say that the Government are doing nothing could not be more wrong, because we are leading the world in decarbonisation. I will not list the very many ways in which we are doing that, owing in part to time constraints, but also owing to the fact that many other Conservative Members have already done so.

Between 2010 and 2018, greenhouse gas emissions fell by 25%. CO₂ emissions have fallen six years in a row, the longest run of reductions on record, and last year they fell to the level they were at 130 years ago. We are achieving that without compromising on economic growth, defying the naysayers who argue that we must choose between prosperity and the planet.

The debate on decarbonising our economy as effectively as possible is a serious one, and it merits serious discussion, not grandstanding gestures such as suddenly declaring an emergency. We should be working constructively with the UK Government to build on their achievements. I therefore hope that they will take into consideration three landmark publications. One of those, as others have mentioned, is the report of the Committee on Climate Change, which is due out tomorrow and which I very much look forward to reading. The second is a recent report from the Scottish Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, on the future of the Scottish oil and gas industry, and the third is last week's report from the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee on carbon capture, usage and storage.

CCUS technology will be a necessary part of any serious plan to decarbonise our economy. The St Fergus gas plant in my constituency of Banff and Buchan, which is connected by an existing pipeline to the industrial complex at Grangemouth, is also known as the Scottish cluster. It is one of five clusters currently being considered for Government investment, which should be operational by the mid-2020s. In north-east Scotland, we have the expertise and we have the infrastructure in old North sea oil and gas wells and pipelines that we can take advantage of. I know that the UK Government are committed to CCUS and to the development of at least two cluster sites. I agree with what Members from all parts of the House have said: there is space for more ambition. Today, I am calling on the UK Government to commit to developing—or to consider developing—at least three CCUS clusters, to be operational by the mid-2020s, including, of course, the one in north-east Scotland.

The necessary investment will be outweighed many times over by the economic benefits of being a world leader in CCUS technology exports, by allowing heavy industry to continue in a low-carbon economy, by fighting climate change and by being able to export that expertise around the world, as that expertise will be much sought after in the years to come.

This is how we deal with climate change. This is how we decarbonise our economy. It is not by shouting about an emergency, but by building on real action, on CCUS and on other projects that this UK Government are already implementing.

🕒 4.34pm

Matthew Pennycook >

(Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)

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In the short time I have, I want to make three simple points in support of the motion. The first is that it is essential that this House formally declares an environment and climate emergency. I listened to the Environment Secretary, and I do not believe that he formally committed the Government to doing so, but he did recognise that the situation that we face is an emergency—by contrast to what the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth said last week. I will quote what she said, because it struck me at the time:

“I do not see the point of saying anything unless we take action”.—[[Official Report, 23 April 2019; Vol. 658, c. 612.](#)]

I do not think that she could have been more wrong, because language matters. Of course deeds must follow words, but the manner in which we define problems in turn shapes our conceptions not only of the range of possible solutions, but also of what is necessary.

We have to stop talking about climate change as though it were some benign force and start talking about what we are really confronting: an ongoing and accelerating crisis from which no one will escape and which will have profound and potentially existential consequences for everything that every one of us holds dear. That is arguably a reason that the Extinction Rebellion movement has struck a chord and it is why—at least to my mind—a degree of alarmism is entirely justified, as long as that fear acts as a clarion call to act, rather than merely provoking a sense of hopelessness. Complacency remains the greatest barrier to the response that is required. We must therefore do everything we possibly can to bring home to the public the nature of the threat we face and to build consensus for the kind of disruptive change that will inevitably have to take place as we respond to it.

My second point is that the unique situation in which we find ourselves demands a far more vigorous response than the Government have provided to date, and it demands that that response begins now. There is no doubting that there is cause for pride in the UK's record when it comes to climate action, but it is also undeniably the case that the reductions achieved over recent years are largely the result of having picked the low-hanging fruit, that our annual rate of emissions reduction is slowing and that we are not on track to meet our binding emissions targets.

Where, then, is the commitment from the Government to bold policies of the kind that would drive deep decarbonisation across the whole economy and get us back on track? Given all that we know—the fact that the Paris pledges will still amount to 2.7 °C of warming and that we are not on track to meet those pledges—our collective response cannot simply be business as usual. Legislating for net zero emissions by 2050 should be the absolute minimum that we are aiming for, and it should spur a far more ambitious policy agenda.

My third and final point is that the institutions of government as they are currently organised are simply not set up for the scale and pace of the transition required to avert catastrophic climate breakdown. The abolition of the Department of Energy and Climate Change three years ago was a serious mistake, but it was also emblematic of a more deep-seated failure on the part of the Government to accord emissions reduction the status it requires. When I was a member of the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change, I remember repeatedly pressing the then Secretary of State on the inadequacies of the clean growth inter-ministerial group, but at least a body of that kind existed at that time; it does not now. If the Government were really serious about this crisis, their response would be driven relentlessly from the centre, with the institutional architecture put in place to co-ordinate and drive progress across all Departments, with emissions reduction woven throughout Government policy; it is not.

In all likelihood, we have probably already squandered the opportunity to avert an unprecedented degree of warming, but what we do in the coming 10 to 15 years will determine whether we avert even more drastic change and the suffering that will surely define a world where emissions continue to rise unabated. We must declare an environment and climate emergency, act in a way that is commensurate with such an emergency and reform the machinery of government so that we are able to drive forward this agenda. That is why I will wholeheartedly support the motion this evening.

🕒 4.38pm

Richard Benyon >

(Newbury) (Con)

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It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). I agree with him that the architecture of government needs to change to reflect the dire urgency of the issue. I want to ensure that any changes that this or any future Government make are not just about moving the deckchairs on the Titanic, but that they are actually part of a coherent strategy that goes through every single Department and every agency, and that that urgency is reflected in them.

I commend the Opposition for what is, I think, a perfectly reasonable motion. I would have improved on it—it could have been a little more congratulatory—but essentially it is a quite a mature bit of opposition. However, I want to reflect for a moment on what the key point about creating a climate and environment and emergency is really saying. As far as I am concerned, of course we have an emergency. Seven years ago, I attended the Pacific Islands Forum, representing Her Majesty's Government, and there I met the leaders of island states who are buying leaseholds on other islands because theirs are practically uninhabitable. The land where they have grown the food on which they depend is salinated because of rising seawater, and there are whole hosts of other reasons why they look one in the face and say, "We have, now, a climate emergency."

The IPCC has given us 12 years. In climate science, that is a heartbeat. We have to get this right. The ice shelves are melting at 10 times the predicted rate, last year 39 million acres of tropical and rain forest were lost, and it is predicted that one third of the species we have on this planet now will be lost by 2050 unless we do something. The crucial question is whether the UK is doing its bit. It sterilises the debate if Opposition Members just attack us. I am looking forward to some generous comments from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who, no doubt, in the balanced nature of this debate, will applaud the Government for what they have done to be a world leader.

But let us talk about more important things: about where we are going in future. I want to reflect on the very good speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and the really inspirational words from the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). Can Parliament reflect the nation's concerns? Can it raise its game to talk about this in a way that does not make people out there turn a tin ear to our deliberations? It can, of course, by welcoming the fact that there is a fair degree of cross-party consensus. I entirely recognise the point made by the right hon. Gentleman that there will be socialist tinge to this, and there will be a free-market tinge on the Conservative Benches, but essentially we all want the same outcome and we all accept the science. Unfortunately, that is not the case in the United States, where it is an entirely polarising issue. Let us be glad that it is not that way here.

We have to be honest with our constituents. Young people come to my door and say that we need to be at net zero by 2025. Well, we would all like that, but let us explain to them, using the data, what it would actually require. I hope that tomorrow we will have a very clear steer from the Committee on Climate Change about what is going to be required to get there by 2050, and by 2045 in the largest amount. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman in saying, “For goodness’ sake, let us be positive with our constituents.” It is one thing to scare the pants off them, and there is a perfectly legitimate reason for doing that, but let us also be positive and explain to them that mankind has an extraordinary ability to overcome the most appalling problems, and we have the ability to do that now. We can use the power of market forces. This is where I would slightly differ from the Leader of the Opposition. Properly regulated, properly incentivised market forces can achieve enormous amounts, as my right hon. Friend said—particularly in the area of electric vehicles, for example.

While most people support what we are doing, they are also taking their children to school, trying to keep their mortgage paid and trying to keep the roof over their head. They want to know that we are on it, that we have a real sense of purpose and that, across the political class represented in this Chamber, we are going to get this sorted.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order. I have to reduce the time limit to three minutes. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) should not be surprised, because he can count as well as I can how many of his colleagues want to speak and how little time is left.

 4.44pm

Danielle Rowley >

(Midlothian) (Lab)

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In February, I asked the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth whether she really believed the Government were doing enough on climate change. Her answer was:

“I am very pleased to assure the hon. Lady that we are not only doing enough, but leading the developed world.”—[\[Official Report, 12 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 726.\]](#)

Clearly, after pressure from young people striking and the protests that have taken place, the Government have been forced to change their language. They now admit that much more needs to be done, which is welcome, and the Secretary of State recognised that in his opening remarks.

In spite of that rhetoric, the Government have failed to take the necessary action on climate change. I could mention many things, and we are short on time, but I cannot support anything that puts green jobs at risk. Urgent action is needed, and it must be bold, transformative and jobs-centred. We need change driven by the Government, including to transform our economy. Our current economic system threatens the foundations on which human wellbeing depends. Building a sustainable economy needs a fundamental rethink of the way we run and measure its success, so that GDP, which takes no account of environmental impact or human wellbeing, is no longer the only benchmark. We need to adapt how we produce goods and services to reflect natural constraints.

As the party of workers, Labour is unequivocal that the required shift to a net zero-emissions economy must be fair for communities and workers. What we need is nothing short of a green industrial revolution, which will allow us to develop jobs and investment opportunities across the UK, such as the 50,000 well-paid, unionised jobs that Labour would create in Scotland.

It is clear that the demand for change from our young people and campaigners is not about business as usual, with bold words but bland action tinkering around the edges. They are explicit that this is about ensuring that actions are transformational, addressing the systemic drivers of environmental degradation and climate change. Labour is committed to doing that. My constituents in

Midlothian are extremely concerned about not only climate change but the environmental crisis. Scotland's rivers, including my local River Esk, are being frequently polluted, and it is awful to see.

I will sum up with the words of my constituent, who wrote to me recently to say:

“Current legislation appears to be serving companies; it is serving ‘convenience’, which translates into suffering, poisoning and harm for wildlife and ecosystems, and it is serving profits and the economy.”

We must create a system that is for the people, for the planet and for the many.

🕒 4.47pm

Sir Mike Penning >

(Hemel Hempstead) (Con)

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It has been a pleasure to sit in the Chamber for this debate, and I am really pleased about the consensus across the House today. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) must have had a heart attack when I signed her early-day motion on 13 March, which called for a UK-wide climate emergency. I did so because I passionately believe in the need for that. My daughter was home from Australia. She is a marine biologist, and she told me in no uncertain terms what daddy should do. She is 30 years of age, and I often listen to her. I have been involved in this campaign since I joined the World Wide Fund for Nature and adopted a dolphin for my daughter when she was nine years of age. She is now working in the environment, which is not the highest-paid job.

It is the young people who have driven this campaign, and not just today but for many years. There was movement in this House before the demonstrations took place around the country. This is part of the movement. Before the young lady came over here—an unbelievably clever, intelligent and fluidly speaking young lady—the movement was going on in this country, and perhaps we needed that extra nudge.

This might sound strange, but I am disappointed that we are not going to vote this evening. I understand why the motion will be agreed and why those on the Government Benches will support it, but we should have put a marker out there. Perhaps on another day, when not so many Members on both sides of the House are away preparing for the elections tomorrow, we can come back and do this again and again.

There are two parts of most of what I have heard today that need to be touched on again. One is people's trust in us that what we are telling them to do is good for them. We told the British public to go and buy diesel cars. That is what the experts and the scientists told us, and we did that and that was driven forward across Europe and across the western world. We are now telling them to scrap them, and that they are nasty, horrible, dirty things. People do not just switch. For people on a low income who have invested in a car, that is their freedom: it is what they need on a daily basis. For me, this issue is rightly important, and we have to make sure that we get right what we tell them to do.

The other issue is plastics. Why are we selling plastic in this country that is not recyclable? The Government could do something about this tomorrow. I am sure there would be consensus to do so, and we could make sure that we recycle all plastic sold in this country.

🕒 4.50pm

Janet Daby >

(Lewisham East) (Lab)

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We need our environment, and the environment needs us to care for it. In the last week, we have had powerful reminders from Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion that the time to take decisive action on climate change is now. Scientists project that in 12 years it could be too late to prevent levels of pollution from causing irreversible damage to our planet and, indeed, our society.

I will focus particularly on air quality, as it is about this issue that I have mostly been contacted by my constituents. The concentration of nitrogen dioxide in the air in my constituency is falling, but in many areas it still exceeds the legal limits put in place to protect us. There are 453 London primary and secondary schools in areas that exceed legal air quality limits. I have recently

spoken about improving air quality at Heath House school in my constituency, and to children at Torridon Primary School, who have written beautiful letters to me about climate change. Children are clearly leading the way on this, which is to the credit of our schools and our teachers. It is time we took notice, time we paid attention and time we took action.

The busy South Circular Road runs through my constituency, and many will know of the tragic death of Ella Kissi-Debrah, which has been linked to spikes in nitrogen dioxide in that polluted hotspot. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of her mother, Rosamund, who works tirelessly to campaign to improve air quality. I am delighted that the Mayor of London has taken action to tackle the problem in London, including with the ultra-low emission zone and low-emission bus zones. ULEZ will improve air quality, and by 2025 no primary or secondary schools will be in areas exceeding legal air quality limits, while the gap in air quality between high and low-income areas of London will be reduced by 71%.

We must live more sustainably. We need transformative action, and it is important that we do this. I urge the Government to recognise the scale of the problem, to declare a climate emergency and to begin legislation for a net zero emission target as soon as possible.

🕒 4.53pm

Bim Afolami >

(Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)

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First, I congratulate my constituent Maddie Evans from St George's School, Harpenden, who has managed to make it out of school to come to this debate. I think she is somewhere up in the Gallery, or at least I was told she was. I congratulate her on that, and I hope she will not get into trouble for doing so. *[Interruption.]* Let us move on.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said in this debate, but it is important that we recognise that no party has a monopoly on virtue on this subject, and most of the speeches so far in the debate have made that clear. There are some things to celebrate: 2018 was a record year for renewable energy, and CO₂ emissions have reduced year on year in every year of the life of this Government. This is the Government who banned microbeads and who have reduced plastic bag usage by over 85%. It is also the Government who support nuclear power, which helps us in our overall aims in this area.

However, I was very taken by the excellent speech by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). He talked compellingly about the act of political persuasion. We need to take our constituents with us on this journey; people from “planet politics” should not be telling them how they should be taxed more or have their cars taken away. We have to take our constituents with us. How do we do that? We need to show them that their lives can be better and richer—richer in both the social and economic senses—as a result of making the changes towards decarbonising our economy. How do we do that?

I thought I would give some examples of what we are doing in Hitchin and Harpenden. We are installing many more electric car charging points. We are improving our cycle routes, such as the Nickey line, which connects the village of Redbourn with Harpenden. That not only reduces car usage, but makes people fitter and happier through cycling. We are protecting our chalk streams such as the River Mimram. Heartwood forest, a new forest of almost 1,000 hectares, is just north of the village of Sandridge in my constituency and protects biodiversity in Hertfordshire.

I am listing all those things not only because I am a very proud constituency MP but to say that if we can show people how their day-to-day lives can be better and richer as a result of taking into account the climate emergency that we are declaring today, we can persuade them to make the larger, more systemic changes that I think we all realise we need to see.

🕒 4.56pm

Rosie Duffield >

(Canterbury) (Lab)

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I am relieved and pleased that today my party is urging the Government to declare an environmental and climate emergency. It is our duty to do so on behalf of every citizen of not only the UK but the world: those who do not have the chance to raise their voices in this place and those who have raised their voices outside here in many towns and cities across the country and beyond our shores.

There is a climate emergency. We have no more time to speculate, discuss, dither or hesitate and taking action is now urgent. Now is the time to listen to the experts, scientists and groups such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and ClientEarth. There has been plenty of discussion here and in the media in the past few weeks about the protests, the school strikes and the young people who have forced the climate emergency on to the news agenda. At a time when only one issue has been completely dominating all our agendas in this place, those protestors have forced us to notice that, while we have been distracted elsewhere, our planet is breaking down.

The devastating impacts of the warming of the planet cannot possibly now be ignored. Food production, agriculture, our oceans and wildlife and the very air that we breathe are all of course vital to sustaining life on earth itself. We are denying ourselves and future generations the most beautiful treasures that our planet has to offer, such as our coral reefs, which we have allowed to be all but entirely destroyed. Our greed and desire for instant, throwaway products that float out to sea, destroying the ocean wildlife, has got to change. We need to let go of our dependency on the quickest, fastest and easiest and learn to reuse and recycle as part of our everyday lives.

In my constituency, air pollution is a very serious concern. Despite that, our council has inadequate and outdated air monitoring equipment that, according to local experts, is unfit for purpose. One such expert is Professor Stephen Peckham, director of the Centre for Health Services Studies at the University of Kent. He set up Canterbury Clean Air, of which I am proud to have been founding member, a few years ago. Together, the group used more suitable monitors, which could measure particulates such as PM_{2.5}. The levels recorded were much higher than those recommended by the World Health Organisation. The levels of NO₂ and ozone, or O₃, also regularly exceed national hourly limits. According to Professor Peckham and his team, those pollutants cause significant health problems, especially among children, whose lungs become stunted.

I join my colleagues across the House to urge the Government to see the situation as the emergency it is and allow us to tackle climate change urgently.

🕒 4.59pm

Tom Tugendhat >

(Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)

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It is a privilege to speak in this debate. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend and neighbour the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the Front Bench; he will remember when we cycled up the A21 together.

The local infrastructure starting to emerge in west Kent is extremely impressive, and the work done by our local councils in greening the areas where we live is fantastic. This is not just a domestic debate, however. In fact, it is particularly not a domestic debate. As we declare a climate change emergency today, it is essential that we remember that. Privileged as I am to chair the Foreign Affairs Committee, it is important to look around the world and see where the threats appear. For example, when we look at the low-lying fields of the Mekong and the threats to rice production, which feeds so many millions—indeed, billions—in south-east Asia, or when we look at the south-east of China and see many intensively inhabited areas of that country at threat, it is important that we talk about this question not just for ourselves but for the whole world.

Many Members will have heard me being critical of one aspect of China this morning, so they will perhaps forgive me if I reflect on a different aspect. China's work on reforestation and changing and reversing the desertification of many areas of land is inspiring. What that country has done to promote better green policies in certain areas is in many ways an example to all of us from which we need to draw very important lessons. The threats we see are not just problems for south-east Asia; they affect us here in the west. For example, when we look at some of the triggers—I do not mean all—of the Syrian civil war, which has led to mass migration and very severe political repercussions in Europe, it is impossible not to look at the challenges of climate change in that country and the impact they have had on farmers. Talking about the rise of al-Shabaab in the Maghreb and the Sahel without talking about climate change is just impossible.

As we talk today about climate change, we are talking fundamentally not just about the environmental security of our homes and the dreadful curse of fly-tipping poisoning some of our waterways, which we see in west Kent and, sadly, probably in other areas too, but about how we structure a world to deal with the inability to address those threats unless we reverse some of the impacts of climate change. I welcome this debate very much and I agree that this is an emergency.

🕒 5.02pm

I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) on her excellent, compassionate and warm maiden speech. I feel I have been very lucky over the years with my constituency neighbours, and I am absolutely delighted not to be the only woman ever elected to Gwent any longer.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak up for the many constituents who have contacted me urging support for the motion, which calls for this House to declare an environmental and climate emergency. In fact, the Welsh Labour Government did just that yesterday. I hope we do so today to instil the urgency that is crucially needed. Climate change is wreaking havoc on our wildlife and our habitats, and is putting lives and homes at risk around the world, with the poorest in the world bearing the brunt. Last year was the fourth hottest year on record, and our UK summer was declared by the Met Office to be the joint hottest since records began. As the motion acknowledges, we need an urgent, rapid and large-scale response by the UK Government and, of course, by Governments around the world. Incremental change is not enough.

In Wales, we have been ambitious for the actions set out in “A low carbon Wales”, the first statutory decarbonisation plan. It contains 100 policies and proposals across all sectors of our economy to drive down emissions in Wales. We were one of the first nations in the world to make sustainable development a constitutional duty. We have consistently supported and promoted renewable energy generation; put a planning moratorium on fracking; and supported the development of tidal lagoons. In Wales, we recycle more than anywhere else in the UK and are in touching distance of being the world’s top recycling nation.

We cannot do this alone, however. We need the UK Government to deliver on the areas that are not devolved. The UK may have been a global leader on climate change, but the task is getting much tougher. Onshore wind deployment has fallen by 94% and offshore wind cannot plug the gap. We have removed support for solar and have failed to deliver on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, which would have had huge potential for Newport too. Those are lost opportunities to reduce carbon emissions, and to build the green jobs and economy of the future, of which Wales could be a key part.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which runs the Newport Wetlands reserve in my constituency, highlighted last week that the loss of species including pollinating insects, the destruction of habitats and damage to ecosystems pose as great a threat as climate change. This debate centres on the impact of humans on the natural environment, and there are difficult choices to make, not least in my corner of Wales, on road building and the challenges of looking after workers and communities reliant on carbon-intensive sectors.

This week I received a huge bundle of letters from year 5 and 6 pupils from Magor Church in Wales Primary School, as part of their campaign on plastics. One young pupil, Katie, said in her letter:

“I want to help but I can’t do it on my own.”

I think that echoes the views of many young people calling for action to protect the planet. We should harness the passion of young activists such as my constituents, to protect their future.

 5.05pm

Like many colleagues from across the House, I agree that we are in a climate emergency and should act accordingly. Somerset County Council and other councils around the south-west have already taken the lead on this, and I am glad that other councils, and hopefully the Government, will follow suit.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) gave a very good speech earlier on the responsibility that we in this place have for leadership, honesty and persuasion over the challenge that lies in front of us. It reminded me of a TV series that I am sure many colleagues will have gorged on: “The West Wing”. There is an episode around 10-word answers, and “This is a climate emergency and we must act now” is a 10-word answer. That is the easy bit; we can all say that and mean it and genuinely want to do something about it. However, the bit that comes next is hugely challenging, and that is where we have to start having conversations with our constituents.

The shadow Business Secretary has some great ideas on this, but at the weekend I saw her on television talking about subsidies for fossil fuels. Referring to the EU's accounting of it, she meant things such as the 5% VAT on heating fuel and the forgone taxation from the refusal to implement the motoring fuel escalator. To say those are subsidies for fossil fuels is fine—we have to tackle those issues; we use fossil fuels too much for heating and transport—but let us not pretend by using the line “subsidies for fossil fuels” that there are not enormous challenges about which we must be honest with our constituents.

From that comes the whole issue of boiler and car scrappage, and how we do that in a socially just way, because invariably those least able to replace their boilers or cars are the ones driving the most polluting cars or using the least efficient boilers. It is a hugely difficult challenge, about which we must have an honest discussion, as we must on the requirement to bring about carbon capture and storage or to look at hydrogen as a means for allowing our heavy industry to continue. We have to be honest about the costs of doing that, but also about the advantages.

Time prohibits me from going through a whole list of things that I think we—as a Parliament, across the House—can lead on. We can sell a vision of a life that is better, more comfortable and more sustainable, but we will not do it if we jump on easy-to-grab soundbites such as “subsidies on fossil fuels”, and then pretend that to eradicate those subsidies would not bring a profound challenge to our cost of living. The challenge is enormous. We must stand together.

🕒 5.08pm

Albert Owen >

(Ynys Môn) (Lab)

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It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful speech from the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey). I begin by congratulating the newest Member of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), on her maiden speech.

Moving on to the subject matter, the science is absolutely clear: the climate is warming and the global mean temperature is rising, enhanced by human activity. The protestors I met last week said that, the young people I meet daily in my constituency tell me that and my family tell me that. We need to act. I received a thoughtful letter and petition from students at Ysgol David Hughes comprehensive school in my constituency, who went on strike. Our young people get it.

To be fair, my local authority is a leader in the United Kingdom on recycling, the Welsh Government have a good record on recycling and Surfers Against Sewage declared the isle of Anglesey a plastic-free county. I am proud of our local record.

I say this to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy because it is important—and I worked with him when he was in opposition and our party was in Government, and I give him credit for his consistency: Wales spends twice as much on energy efficiency measures as the UK Government, and Scotland spends even more. Northern Ireland, which does not even have a sitting Government, spends one and half times more than the UK Government. These are important matters to highlight, because we are going backwards, and England is the largest of the four nations of the United Kingdom. We need to do more. I understand the point about austerity, but all parts of the UK—local authorities and the nations' Administrations—have had to deal with austerity as well. We need to concentrate.

We built a consensus in the House around the Climate Change Act, and I was proud to be a part of that. We were world leaders. We now need to reset the energy button, which is why I want to concentrate on power. We need to invest in our natural resources more. Subsidy is not a dirty word. All technologies in this country were once subsidised. Oil and gas were 100% subsidised. The Secretary of State will know what I am going to say: we need to invest more in tidal and wave energy. It is so predictable. We need to do it now. First-of-its-kind technology will be very expensive, but if we do not do it, we will be back here in years to come saying, “We just about missed out target”. We could meet our target with a proper funding system for large energy infrastructure projects. I will work with him to ensure that happens. We should consider the Welsh Water not-for-profit model. It puts customers first and our environment first. We in the House must follow suit.

🕒 5.11pm

Derek Thomas >

(St Ives) (Con)

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On Friday, the RSPB launched its “Let Nature Sing” track and accompanying video, which we should promote as much as we can. The track brings attention to the fact that we have 40 million fewer birds today and reminds us of birdsong. It is a call to action. We can add to that the loss of pollinating insects, the destruction of habitats and the 1 million species under threat. These problems alone are reason enough to declare a climate emergency, and I am glad to be speaking in this debate.

The Government must commit to and grow a low-carbon economy. The country wants us to accelerate action and lead the world. I want briefly to mention the sustainable development goals. They have not been mentioned yet, but they include clear commitments to helping the world’s poorest countries address climate change, and there are things that we, as a global leader, can do.

At home, there are things we must do. Getting it right will reduce the demand on the NHS; create and spread wealth across all corners of the UK, which is of particular interest to Cornwall; reduce demand on energy supply; provide warm and comfortable homes, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) made clear; support small businesses and create skilled workforces, especially in construction and the renewables sector; boost the car manufacturing industry and innovation in greener fuels; and support sustainable food production.

Practical measures are needed. Cornwall Council is one of the first councils, if not the first, to commit to being carbon-free by 2030. We are talking about funding and accelerating the work to address fuel poor homes; launching a car scrappage scheme to support poorer families to move to more fuel efficient vehicles; and increasing support such as that provided by Salix Finance, which provides 100% interest-free loans to public buildings, including schools, so that they can put renewable solutions on their roofs and reap the benefits once the loans are repaid.

We are also calling for the introduction of the environment Bill, which the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), assured me in a recent debate will happen immediately after the next Queen’s Speech. In that Bill, we must establish the nature recovery network, invest in woodland recovery and incentivise landowners to adopt nature-friendly practices. Finally, people in Cornwall are calling for citizens’ assemblies to be established to identify solutions both nationally and locally and give people a stake in how this country moves forward.

The Government must take a lead. Councils such as the Duchy of Cornwall want to get on top of this agenda, conquer this and be a force for good, but they need Government policy and funds to allow them to do it.

🕒 5.14pm

Clive Lewis >

(Norwich South) (Lab)

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So often as politicians we talk about what is politically possible, but with the climate crisis we need to move from the art of the politically possible to the science of what is necessary. When you are drowning, you do not ask yourself, “Ooh, what is politically possible?”; you do whatever it takes to survive. When the banks crashed in 2008, the political consensus in this place was to save them by any means necessary. According to the National Audit Office, the cost was £1.2 trillion, which meant 10 years of austerity, public service cuts and vast human suffering. But now, instead of a banking collapse, we face a climate and ecological collapse. We face catastrophes of biblical proportions: droughts, pestilence, famine, floods, wildfires, mass migration, political instability, war and terrorism. Global civilisation as we know it will be gone by the end of the century unless we act.

What has been the response from the Conservatives? I will try not to be too partisan. We have seen the green light for fracking, fossil fuel subsidies boosted by billions, onshore wind scrapped, solar support axed, the green homes scheme eviscerated, zero-carbon homes abandoned, the green bank sold off, the Swansea tidal lagoon stuffed, and Heathrow approved. If Tory environmental policy in 2010 could be summed-up as “hug a husky”, the 2019 policy looks more like “Shoot it, skin it, and boil it down to its bones.”

It was against that background—with the science of the climate crisis over here and Government policy over there—that Greta Thunberg, the youth strikers and Extinction Rebellion appeared. They arrived at the climate crisis debate like gatecrashers at a premature funeral, smashing through the window in a shower of glass to announce to a hushed congregation that the patient was still alive. Their message to this place is simple: “The time for incrementalism has passed. Act now, change now, or be swept away by those who will.”

This motion offers us a chance to fundamentally restructure our economy to deliver good, secure, well-paid jobs as we mobilise to decarbonise our economy on a grand scale. It offers us a chance to reinvigorate and strengthen our democracy, to massively reduce social and economic inequalities, and to protect and restore vital threatened habitats and carbon sinks. We must onshore the global

financial system, bringing it back under democratic control.

That brings me to my final point. Navigating global society through the perils of the 21st century will require two key things: global co-operation, and human ingenuity and passion on a scale hitherto unseen in our entire history. President Kennedy summed it up in his moon-shot speech of 1962. He did not ask what it would cost; he asked instead what it would take to succeed. He said:

“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win”.

🕒 5.17pm

Trudy Harrison >

(Copeland) (Con)

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It will come as no surprise to anyone in the House that I shall advocate nuclear as the most game-changing, transformative way in which to tackle the climate problem and significantly—seriously—reduce our carbon emissions. There is, quite simply, no alternative. Nuclear is unparalleled. It is safe, proven and efficient technology. Its capability to generate clean energy 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for 60 years is incredible.

Rolling out the Government’s third-generation nuclear reactors would generate more than 18 GW of clean, safe, low-carbon energy, while also creating thousands of jobs, apprenticeships and training places and improving local communities. I speak with some experience, having lived in a nuclear community for 43 years and having worked in the industry. Because the last Labour Government failed to invest in new nuclear, the last power station to be built was Sizewell B. Our current power stations are coming to the end of their long-serving lives, which means that our carbon emissions will soar, as they have in Germany and Japan. If Germany had invested the same amount that it invested in renewables—\$580 billion—in nuclear, it would now have zero carbon emissions.

This Conservative Government are rightly shouting loudly and proudly, having celebrated 90 of the cleanest hours last Easter, and 2018 was the cleanest, greenest year ever in the United Kingdom. Renewables are great, but they are geographically limiting, and intermittent by their very nature. Last June, wind turbines were operating at only 4% of their potential. This Government are the first to take decarbonisation seriously, with Hinkley Point C now under construction. I welcome with great anticipation the small modular reactor competition, the UK consortium, and advanced modular reactors, which will enable us to reduce waste in the industry. I also welcome the energy White Paper and the regulated asset-based financial model, which I very much hope will ensure that we can reduce the cost of new nuclear as well.

The Leader of the Opposition has consistently argued against nuclear power. He voted against Sizewell B and against Hinkley Point C; he has campaigned against nuclear his entire working life.

The evidence is clear: denuclearisation increases carbon emissions. Countries around the world are now realising this, and I know this Government are taking decarbonisation seriously.

🕒 5.20pm

Chris Elmore >

(Ogmore) (Lab)

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The climate change debate has moved on rapidly in recent months, and let us all agree on one thing: we are no longer here to debate whether this problem is happening. Look at what is happening to our planet: from the scorching hot week we had in February this year to the blistering hot summer last year, our climate is changing even in the UK before our very eyes, but while these ice-lolly weather patterns might be a gift to some of us in the western world with some capacity to adapt, the price we pay for them as a planet is catastrophic. We see what is happening to our climate in the UK and its effects, namely extreme weather, both hot and cold, of increasing frequency, but we must always remember that our country is predicted by climate scientists to be one of the least affected by global climate change.

In 2019, when we think about and debate climate change action it is not enough simply to coo over David Attenborough and give ourselves a pat on the back for shining a light on what is happening to our world; as other Members have said, we must act and we must act now. This is the biggest issue humanity has ever faced, and it requires us to be bold and to do much more than just speak out. Indeed, Greta Thunberg put this better than I or any other Member could:

“To do your best is no longer good enough. We must all do the seemingly impossible.”

But what can we do? Well, for a start, we must support today’s motion, which is about acting decisively to lead the way and being a catalyst for change both here in the UK and internationally. The magnitude of this issue demands cross-party consensus and it demands that we act swiftly. Taking this first step today must be the start of us taking the right path at this most precarious of crossroads.

I cannot speak out in this debate without putting on record how deeply disappointed I was when on her first day in office one of the Prime Minister’s first acts was to abolish the Department of Energy and Climate Change. What message did this send to the rest of the world? It sent the message that the UK was no longer a leader on climate change, but was instead resigned to being a follower. Let us not forget that under the last Labour Government we became the first country in the world to legislate legally binding carbon budgets, in the Climate Change Act 2008.

I will conclude now, given the time limit. I want to leave hon. Members, and particularly the Government, with this point. What if the French fire service had known about last month’s fire at Notre Dame 10 years before it happened? What if we had known about any of the terrorist atrocities across the world 10 years before they happened? Just think what preventive action we would have taken if we had had that level of foresight and known about those catastrophes, and countless others, a decade ahead of them happening. With climate change we have that foresight and, crucially, the means to do something about it. The legs of the stool are there, as it were, but there is still one missing: us, and that is all it takes for this whole thing to fall over.

So when we leave this place today and go back to talking about other important matters such as no-deal cliff edges, let us all commit to remember one thing: if we think the no-deal cliff edge is scary, it is barely in the foothills of what the climate cliff edge could look like.

🕒 5.23pm

Antoinette Sandbach >

(Eddisbury) (Con)

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It will come as no surprise to Ministers sitting on the Treasury Bench that I rise to speak about energy efficiency.

I was fortunate enough to go to two schools on Friday, Shocklach and Willow Wood, and both sets of pupils talked to me about the importance of the climate to them, but they also asked what we are doing about it—and that is what this debate is about. I am very pleased that the Government have brought forward their green growth strategy. There is so much positive action that the Government have taken, but I have to say that I do think we have made one mistake: removing the zero-carbon homes standard. It is wrong that we are now building homes that will need to be retrofitted; we have a lot of homes that need energy efficiency measures installed now, and I want to talk about some of the benefits we could deliver by introducing energy efficiency measures.

If £1 billion was put into bringing the energy performance certificate standard up to C we could save every family £270. We could put £270 back into their pockets and create approximately £51 billion-worth of revenue for the Exchequer as that programme rolled out annually. It would also save 25% of our energy consumption, which would be the equivalent of the output of six nuclear power stations the size of Hinkley Point C. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who made the case for nuclear, but I would also argue that we absolutely need to ensure that our homes are energy efficient—not only because of the savings in electricity generation, but because the CO₂ and carbon savings are estimated at about £34 billion-worth of cost and the air quality improvements are estimated at about £4.1 billion of cost.

An excellent document has been prepared by the Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group and I urge the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to encourage the Chancellor to put that document into his red box to read before the spending review. We have seen how Germany has harnessed low-interest loans to generate £8.4 billion-worth of home improvements by homeowners that were virtually paid for by the VAT receipts on those sales. That was a self-financing project, which is one way to help to tackle this problem.

🕒 5.26pm

Alex Norris >

(Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)

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We are 10 years away from the edge of the biggest crisis that humanity will ever face. No ifs, no buts—if this is left unchecked, it will happen in our lifetime. The actions that we take tonight, tomorrow and in the coming days and weeks—and, crucially, over the next decade—will determine the course of history.

What have we already seen? What is coming to us if we do not act? We have seen the melting of global ice stores, shifting seasons and migration patterns, extreme weather—we have certainly seen that already in the UK—and droughts, not only in developing countries but across the world. We have also seen wildfires, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) said, and the degradation of our coral reefs, many of which have been lost forever. We see rising food prices hitting the poorest hardest, and we see deforestation not just by humans but by invasive species that thrive in warmer temperatures. That is our backdrop. The question today is not whether we should act; it is, what on earth can we do to act quickly enough to reverse some of the damage we have already done and prevent the damage that we could inflict in the future?

This is fundamentally an issue of global justice. Climate change is already hitting the poorest hardest, and as we help them to rebuild and develop their communities, we must avoid prescribing for them the old models of growth that have led us to this situation. Instead, we must promote new, sustainable development models. That is why we on this side of the House are committed to stopping aid spending on fossil fuels, and I hope that the Government will meet us in that commitment.

I want to speak briefly about protests. To those who joke and laugh at the millions of schoolchildren and street protesters taking part in climate strikes, and who brand them truants or virtue signallers, I say this: “You are on the wrong side of history, and we will act without you.” Let them look at this debate today and see how well subscribed it is. The protesters have clearly got our attention.

So what comes next? We must support today’s motion and become the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency, but we must also have radical change in our economy after that. In our energy system, our transport, our agriculture, our waste processing and everything in between, we must put forward the following test: is this short-term gain going to result in long-term consequences for our climate? Would fracking pass that test? Of course it would not. These questions must also be asked by international Governments and by our local government. I am proud that Labour colleagues going into the local elections have committed to making Nottingham carbon zero by 2028. That is on the ballot paper in our local elections. The Government should help to meet that energy target by electrifying our trains. It is absolutely absurd that we are buying new trains that will be carbon emitters.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we want to be the generation that had the greatest knowledge of what we are doing to our world but chose to do nothing? Surely not. We have been debating this issue for nearly four hours and I have not heard a dissenting voice, so it looks as though we are going to declare the emergency today, but tomorrow we have to act.

🕒 5.29pm

Peter Aldous >

(Waveney) (Con)

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Britain has a good record in recognising the global threat of climate change and taking steps to address it. That said, the threat of climate change is growing, and more action is required on more fronts. Tomorrow, the Committee on Climate Change will provide its recommendations for how to shift the UK’s long-term climate target to net zero emissions by 2050, and I anticipate that the Government will respond positively and proactively. That will complement the measures already being taken, which embed tackling climate change in the nation’s DNA.

The industrial strategy leads into the clean growth strategy, from which sector deals are derived. The offshore wind sector deal, which the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth launched in Lowestoft in March, is helping to revitalise the local economy, and ScottishPower has set up its operations and maintenance base in the dock. Also, an offshore engineering training facility is under construction at East Coast College.

The low-carbon economy offers enormous opportunities to grow our domestic economy and to create expertise that we can export around the world. Oil and gas extraction on the UK continental shelf has played a crucial role in the UK and East Anglian economies for over 50 years, and the industry has an important role to play in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The skills and expertise required in the sector overlap to a large degree with those required in offshore renewables. The two industries are already working together on such innovative projects as gas-to-wire, whereby gas from the southern North sea gas fields is generated into electricity offshore and then transmitted to the shore.

Luke Graham >

(Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con)

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Does my hon. Friend welcome the £355 million that has been invested in Scotland's offshore wind industry by the UK Government between 2010 and 2018?

Peter Aldous >

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I do welcome that investment. The two industries go hand in hand. In oil and gas basins all around the world, one will hear Scottish, Geordie and Norfolk and Suffolk accents, and we must ensure that that continues to be the case long after we have extracted the last drop of oil from the North sea and after other countries have moved to forms of renewable energy production.

We need to look closely at what we can do better in many areas, and I will briefly mention four of them. First, the Suffolk coast has been at the forefront of the battle with rising sea levels for a millennium, and the challenge has intensified over the past decade as climate accelerated the rise in the level of the North sea. Innovative schemes have been produced locally to defend both Lowestoft and Kessingland, and it is vital that they are properly funded. Secondly, the roll-out of smart meters is in many respects the elephant in the room that no one talks about. We are not doing well enough, and we need to do better. Thirdly, we were wrong to ditch the zero-carbon homes initiative. It needs to be reinstated, and we must step up plans to retrofit our existing housing stock, thereby reducing fuel poverty. Finally, electricity storage has a vital role to play, but it is threatened by Ofgem's targeted charging review proposals. They must be reviewed, with full implementation delayed until 2023.

Millions of people around the world are imperilled by climate change day to day. We need more of what we are already doing, but on more fronts and with a greater sense of urgency.

 5.33pm

Caroline Lucas >

(Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)

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The failure to act with sufficient ambition to avert the climate catastrophe will be the greatest moral failure of our time. The industrial world's destruction of our planet is essentially the story of a single lifetime. The planet has been brought from seeming stability to the brink of catastrophe in my lifetime, so we have to turn things around in our lifetimes, too. It is the most awesome responsibility, but it is also the most amazing opportunity.

When people look back at this moment, it will not be those blockading bridges or going on strike from school that history will judge severely. It will be those who shut their eyes and blocked their ears to the scale of the challenge. I pay tribute to the work of Extinction Rebellion and the youth climate strikes, because they have already made a difference. The sheer number of people in the Chamber today is testament to that.

We need to be serious. Declaring a climate emergency should not be a few words before we move on with business as usual. Business as usual is climate appeasement. We need change. We need the kind of change we have when we face, for example, conflict or war. We need that kind of single-minded mobilisation, because extraordinary things can happen at extraordinary times. Back in 1938 and for the six years that followed, at that wartime moment, we reduced our use of coal by 25%, we reduced our use of private cars by 95% and public transport use went up by 13% because we had a shared sense of emergency. My plea for today is that we do not just use these words about emergency but that we should be serious and act on them.

Conservative Members sometimes challenge me to say that they have done better and to congratulate the Government on their actions, but it is hard to do that when, for example, the Secretary of State refused to answer my question about aviation expansion. The bottom line is that we cannot be serious about a climate emergency and continue with aviation expansion, Heathrow expansion and fracking. The Government have slashed zero-carbon homes, shafted solar power and banned onshore wind, which is wrong. We need to call them out.

At the same time, we also need to say there is an incredibly positive agenda out there for the drafting. There is a positive agenda on a green new deal, and I am proud that a new environmental justice commission was launched yesterday. The commission will be chaired by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the former Member for South Thanet and me, and it will look at the green new deal, at the mass mobilisation of resources into renewable energy and energy efficiency and at getting transport and agriculture right. We can do that in a way that is driven by workers. We can make sure that no one loses out in the transition and that there is, indeed, a positive story about how we can have a better life for all.

Right now, the statistics are grim. We are one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Fifty-nine scientists said last year that we have lost 60% of the population of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles in my lifetime. That has to change.

🕒 5.36pm

Maggie Throup >

(Erewash) (Con)

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As we have heard, there is much common ground across the Chamber today. Indeed, I am sure there is much common ground across the UK, but the UK cannot tackle climate change or protect the global environment in isolation. We can boast many achievements, but recent weeks have perhaps shown that we have not shouted loud enough about them. Of course, there is always more we can do.

Just last week, I met a Member of the Youth Parliament representing Erewash, Chad Fowkes, to discuss his “Last Straw for Ilkeston” campaign. To help raise awareness of the amount of single-use plastics discarded as litter, Chad has organised a clean-up of the Erewash canal. He shows genuine knowledge and passion for the issues facing our environment and, of course, he persuaded me to help him with the clean-up.

There are many unusual ways in which constituents highlight the issues that concern them. On climate change, one way that grabbed my attention was the handmade messages sent as part of the “Show the Love” campaign, which was far more effective than the hundreds of emails we get every day, and it made me sit up and think about what we are doing to the climate.

There are numerous ways in which we can show leadership in tackling climate change, and one way is through investing in technology. On a recent visit to Ethiopia, in the middle of what we would call scrubland, I saw a few community buildings, one of which had solar panels on its roof with the sole purpose of powering a solar fridge for vaccines. Interestingly, the solar-powered fridge and the associated technology was developed in Bognor Regis. I am sure we can do more to invest in novel technologies to aid developing countries and to increase our exports, which is definitely a win-win situation.

I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) on his ten-minute rule Bill yesterday that would create a legal obligation for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In doing so, we would be the first G20 country to make such a commitment—2050 may seem a long time away but, thinking back 30 years, 1989-90 does not seem too long ago. The net zero carbon emissions ambition would, yet again, show the world that we, as a nation, are true global leaders.

I said at the start of my speech that we do not shout out enough about our achievements, and I want to finish by talking about some of them in the short time I have left. The year 2008 was Britain’s greenest year ever; the World Health Organisation has said in relation to our clean air strategy that the UK is an example for the rest of the world to follow; and greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 23% since 2010. I could go on and on. We need to shout louder and show that we are a true global leader.

🕒 5.39pm

Wera Hobhouse >

(Bath) (LD)

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Let us remind ourselves why we are here: thousands, if not millions, of young schoolchildren protested on the streets, and that is why we are suddenly taking this issue seriously again. I share some of the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). I, too, feel a sense of shame, and I think we all should. What have we done since we have known that this climate catastrophe faced us? Since 2001, we have had Al Gore and “An Inconvenient Truth”, but what have we done since? We have not done enough, and that is why we are here today.

It worries me that we are creating a comfortable consensus and a sense of complacency, with the idea that we just need to do a little bit more, and we are done. No; we need to do a lot more. It is about political choices, and this Government have done far too little. Since the Liberal Democrats left government, the Tories have abandoned climate change as an issue. Subsidies for renewables have been slashed, the Green Investment Bank has been privatised, the proposal for zero-carbon homes has been abandoned and a meaningless target of phasing out new petrol and diesel cars by 2040 has been adopted.

I am disappointed that even though I keep asking the Government about ceasing to support fossil fuel industries such as fracking, I do not get a straight answer. That is one of the simplest things that we can do, because fracking is a fossil fuel industry. Not only do we need to phase out the old industries, but we should invest in renewables and not even consider developing new fossil fuel industries. When we talk about consensus, I hope that the Government will be serious and stop supporting the fracking industry. In the same way, I found it very disappointing to hear a Conservative Member say yesterday that he would not have been elected if he had supported onshore wind. What decisions are we making if we say to ourselves, “I won’t be electable if I support onshore wind farms, because people don’t like the look of them.”? We have to take leadership and do the right thing. I do not blame people, but I will blame us, as politicians, if we do not take leadership.

I want to finish by saying something quickly about consensus. I believe we need consensus and buy-in from the people of this country, and I strongly believe in citizens’ assemblies. Through citizens’ assemblies, we can create consensus about the urgency of tackling this issue, what we can do and how we can do it fairly, so that we burden not those who can least afford it, but those who can most afford it, with the costs. I hope that the Government will listen to this debate and urgently take up some of the demands that have been made, particularly what I and other Members have said about fracking. There is a consensus for stopping fracking, and I believe there is a consensus for continuing with onshore wind. Please, Government, listen. We can make a difference.

🕒 5.43pm

Richard Graham >

(Gloucester) (Con)

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The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) echoed many of the good things that have been said today, by people from all parts of the House, about a cause—climate change—on which we must unite. The key to this is not just calling climate change an emergency, but taking action to show that we mean it. I welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to zero net carbon emissions by 2050 and to planting millions of trees across the country to help to protect our part of the planet. I hope, too, that the Government pull together a cross-departmental plan to deliver that nationally and help us to lead in the world by, for example, using DFID funds to continue the good work of its climate change unit to protect rainforests in Indonesia.

Locally, in Gloucestershire, achieving that means resolving the air pollution on the A38 by Llanthony and the huge A417 Air Balloon problem, as well as finishing the cycle paths on the canal and in the Golden valley from Gloucester to Cheltenham. It means doing much more about litter and Project Refill for water bottles; I hope that our schoolchildren will join me in taking those things forward. It also means closing the residual waste tip at Hempsted and replacing it with grass valleys harvesting solar power in due course. Both locally and nationally, we need to look again at what we will do about onshore wind, and above all at how to use the world’s strongest tide on the River Severn and around the Welsh coast. More generally, around our nation’s coastline, marine energy remains a largely untapped source of green energy.

I want Gloucester to be at the forefront of a green revolution. We are already home to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Robinswood hill, Barnwood arboretum, EDF Energy’s nuclear operational headquarters, the Kingsway green sustainability group and an MP on his cherry-and-white bike. We can make real progress on all the things I have mentioned and help to turn an emergency into an opportunity, for a better city, a greener Gloucester and a zero-carbon United Kingdom.

🕒 5.45pm

Matt Western >

(Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)

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I have requested a climate change debate a couple of times in the past couple of months, so I am delighted that we are having this one today.

I was delighted to attend the session with Greta Thunberg a week ago. Many of us who were there will recall that she kept repeating the line, “Are you listening? Can you hear me?” She was right to be sceptical. Some of us remember the Al Gore film and book from 2006 and the Stern report from the same year. Sadly, the six key messages from that report are as valid today as they were then.

The world’s first Climate Change Act was introduced by the then Labour Government, with whom I am proud to associate myself. Their commitment not only to reducing CO₂ but to having 100% zero-carbon homes by 2016 was a terrific ambition. It was picked up by the coalition Government in their 2011 Budget, but has sadly since fallen by the wayside, as has been mentioned.

It is claimed that there has been a 37% reduction of our territorial CO₂ emissions, but in reality, once aviation, shipping and imports are taken into account, there has been only a 10% reduction. That is why the climate change strikes by young people and the Extinction Rebellion action has been so important: they have brought us all together to discuss this important topic.

As Greta Thunberg said, climate change is the easiest and most difficult challenge faced by humanity. But is it really that hard? It is clear that system change is urgently required, whether that is through changes to the sustainable building code, building at higher densities in our communities, or changes to the planning process, all supported by better infrastructure and public transport. We should be looking at existing properties and how a wholesale programme plan for “pay as you save” home energy insulation could be installed throughout the country. This is the sort of thinking that we need, alongside favouring onshore wind turbines and upgrading our power grids to ensure that we can all use electric vehicles, whether cars or cycles. Look at Germany, where 900,000 electric bikes were purchased last year, as against 64,000 in the UK. Staying in Germany, Munich set itself the ambition to be 100% powered by renewable energy by 2025 and is on target to achieve that.

As a county councillor in Warwickshire, I was proud to propose that we made all of our pension fund fossil-free. Sadly, that proposal was not accepted, but I wish all authorities would consider that step, because it is the sort of wholesale systemic change that we need. Likewise, I proposed a Warwickshire energy plan to introduce renewable energy for all citizens in Warwickshire. Yes, the challenges are systemic and behavioural, but we can address them. We just need the political will.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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Order. I am sure colleagues will appreciate that it is almost impossible to get in everyone who wants to speak, but we will get more people in if colleagues take perhaps two minutes instead of three minutes, to be generous to others. I shall leave it at that.

 5.48pm

Huw Merriman >

(Bexhill and Battle) (Con)

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It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

I absolutely understand the concerns about climate change that have been registered loudly recently, and it is absolutely right that we take them into account, but it is also hugely important that we talk about the progress we have made so far and about building on it, rather than looking at the issue with too much fear and ignorance. I am proud that the UK leads the way, with the most

impressive performance in the reduction of emissions among G20 countries. We have managed to reduce emissions by 44% since the 1990s. It is absolutely key that we drive forward, but we should do so in the belief that we can reach the ambitious targets that we have set ourselves.

Let us take renewables as an example. Back in 2010, only 6% of our electricity was generated from renewables; now, we are at almost 40%, so we should be optimistic. We should tell ourselves that we can do more, but we should also be proud of what we have done and try to lead the way when it comes to the rest of the world. My big concern is what is happening in China. It used to be the case that 70% of our power was reliant on coal. We have reduced that to the point where coal-fired power stations should be phased out by 2025. That is great news, but in China 70% of its power is reliant on coal, and it is currently building hundreds more coal-fired power stations.

The reality is that even the big steps that we take will not make that much of a difference to our one earth, but the small steps that the Chinese can take will make a huge difference. I would like to see this country—this Government—using our soft power to lead China and tell it that it is not acceptable from an environmental or even an economic perspective for it to continue using fossil fuels in the way that it does. We should use our expertise and innovators to try to take China to a better place. The reality is that China pollutes more in a single year than the UK has polluted in 100 years. China will soon be responsible for more pollution than Europe and the US put together, so it is vital that we press the Chinese to do more.

I want to send out the message to young people that, yes, they should be concerned, and that, yes, we should listen to them, but please let us start on the basis that this country has done more than most across the globe and has got itself into a better position. We will deliver more—we are committed to delivering more—but let us deal with the facts and not just the ignorance.

🕒 5.51pm

Liam Byrne >

(Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)

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It was 307 years ago that Thomas Newcomen demonstrated the first working steam engine up in Dudley Castle. It was put to work pretty rapidly, pumping the water out of Lord Dudley's coal mines. Over the next three centuries not only did James Watt and Matthew Boulton go on to perfect the steam engine in Handsworth, but Frank Whittle led the country into the steam age.

From our region, we are very proud of our role in this nation's industrial revolution, but we are conscious too that, as the region that sparked the carbon revolution, we have a moral responsibility now to lead the zero-carbon revolution. That task would be an awful lot easier if the Government could provide to our region four basic ideas—four basic bits of support. First, on energy, we produce just 0.3% of the country's renewable energy. It is pretty difficult to install onshore wind in a place as dense as the west midlands, but we could absolutely roll out solar. It would be much easier if the Government reintroduced the feed-in tariffs that they so unwisely eliminated just a few years ago.

Secondly, transport is the biggest source of carbon emissions in our region. As the Secretary of State knows, we want to be the world centre of battery technology and the electric vehicles revolution in our region. That would be much easier if the Secretary of State paid heed to the Select Committee report and sorted out the muddle around the elimination of carbon-emitting engines and went for its recommendation of 2032 as the deadline for getting rid of carbon cars or vehicles.

Thirdly, on homes, we could decarbonise our housing stock much faster and lift 300,000 people out of energy poverty if we had control of eco-funding at a regional level. Finally, when it comes to replanting our forests, we should be insisting that our airports become carbon-neutral and ask them to pay an endowment to help us replant the Arden Forest and let it reconnect with the national forest planted just north of Lichfield. These are all things that we can do. We want to lead. We need a Government who help us.

🕒 5.53pm

Vicky Ford >

(Chelmsford) (Con)

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Of course there is a climate emergency. The science is very clear: we cannot continue pumping more greenhouse gases into the planet's atmosphere. We need to get to net zero. I was enormously proud yesterday to co-sponsor the net zero carbon Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk).

Yesterday morning, I stood in the control room of National Grid, watching a screen the size of a wall. It was possible to see where all our electricity comes from and where it goes to; the power that has already been generated by those mammoth wind farms in the North sea; the impact of the solar panels as they are lit up; the pumped storage that time-shifts the electricity from one period of time to another; the coal-powered stations that are going down and down and soon will be no more; and, really importantly, those vast interconnectors between ourselves and the continent, which make our own electricity more resilient.

There has been great change in our infrastructure in the past decade, but we need to do more, because even if every home had a solar panel on its roof and every vehicle today was electric, our grid could not cope. The good news is that that change is coming. By 2025, the grid will be able to cope with 100% zero-carbon inputs and every new home in this country will have no fossil fuels to heat it. There is more change coming; I am really looking forward to tomorrow's recommendations from the Committee on Climate Change.

I hope that the recommendations talk more about how we can enable more energy efficiency to save money as well as carbon, and about how we embrace the transition to electric vehicles, in which we are already leading in the EU. I hope that there is more about how we can continue to support our world-leading crop scientists, and our world-leading work on carbon capture and storage, so that we can continue to heat our homes without using more carbon even on cold, sunless and windless days. I also hope that the recommendations mention how we can support our woodlands and our peat bogs.

Most of all, I hope the Committee on Climate Change embraces and encourages the work that we are doing across the world through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Foreign Office, and our leadership in bringing countries together. I hope that those countries all come to London next year, because it is only by leading across the world that we will win this fight for the climate.

🕒 5.56pm

Kerry McCarthy >

(Bristol East) (Lab)

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We need action on so many fronts to tackle this climate emergency, but time is limited so I will speak about just one. Unsurprisingly, it is about the fact that 30% of our global greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to our food system.

If we do not make changes, the food and farming system will singlehandedly use up our Paris climate agreement emissions budget within the next 30 years, yet there is still a woeful failure to rise to the challenge, and there is no excuse. There have been endless wake-up calls, including from the UN, the IPCC, EAT-Lancet, Chatham House, academics from Harvard and Oxford, and many more—I have a big pile of reports in my office—yet politicians are still hitting the snooze button.

Lots of things contribute to the climate impact of our food system: the use of fossil fuels and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers on farms, methane emissions from ruminants, transportation and refrigeration. If food waste were a country, it would have the third largest carbon footprint, behind China and the USA. However, the biggest impact is from land use. Some 48% of UK land is used for animal agriculture, and 55% of that is used for animal feed, rather than for growing food that is directly eaten by humans. The destruction of the Amazon rainforest is driven by industrial farming, which destroys habitats, biodiversity and natural carbon sinks.

It has been more than 10 years since I held a debate in Westminster Hall on the environmental impact of the livestock sector. To say that the reaction I got then was hostile is an understatement, but it now feels like there is a breakthrough. This breakthrough is being led by the public, and the private sector has responded to that public demand. It is not being led by politicians. I really think we need to rise to the challenge and start talking about it. We need a net zero emissions target by 2040 in the Agriculture Bill, which the NFU now backs. We also need to reward farmers who reduce their carbon footprint, to plant more trees and to store more carbon in the soil—and yes, we need to accelerate the trend towards healthier, more sustainable diets by reducing red meat and dairy consumption by at least 30% by 2030.

Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) and I attended an event in Soho hosted by the Meatless Farm Company, which is calling for people to sign up to a meatless consumption target. It commissioned research by Joseph Poore of Oxford University that showed that if people replaced one red meat meal a week with a plant-based meal, it would cut UK

greenhouse gas emissions by some 50 million tonnes—that is a reduction of 8.4% or the equivalent of taking 16 million cars off the road. I call on all the politicians in this place who profess to care about climate change to take up that challenge.

🕒 5.58pm

Dr Caroline Johnson >

(Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)

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As a mother, doctor and the MP for Sleaford and North Hykeham, I am committed to ensuring that our children inherit a world that is cleaner, safer and greener than we found it. This will be achievable only with a serious long-term and ambitious response to tackling the threat of climate change. The importance of this issue to members of the public cannot be underestimated. Indeed, in my own parliamentary office we have seen 10 times more correspondence this month on climate change than we have seen on Brexit.

This is clearly an issue of great importance to the country and my constituency, and I am very glad that the Government see it as such too. We have been a leader both at home and abroad in leading the fight against climate change. We have reduced greenhouse gas emissions in the UK by 25% since 2010, established the international climate fund to provide £5.8 billion to help the world's poorest to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and played a crucial role in delivering the historic 2015 Paris agreement. This Government have achieved all this by decarbonising the economy at the fastest rate of any G20 country since 2000.

I have been proud to play my part through the work of the EFRA Committee in scrutinising the Environment Bill. That Bill, which will come to the Commons soon, will put the 25-year environment plan on to a statutory footing, introduce a set of environmental principles to guide future Government policy making, and establish a world-leading environmental watchdog. It will create a green governance framework that will ensure that Parliaments, for years to come, keep the environment at the heart of their decision making. I look forward to its introduction soon.

It is a common refrain that all politics is local, and climate change is no exception. Reaching the ambitious goals that were set will require action at all levels of government. In Sleaford and North Hykeham, we are lucky to be served by district and county councils that take their role in reducing emissions seriously. For example, North Kesteven District Council has reduced its carbon footprint by an incredible amount—almost 70% in the past 10 years.

Some of the concerns that we have seen on this issue have been due to how climate measures might affect the economy, but actually those fears have been misplaced, because rather than being a shackle on our economy, green energy has been a boost for it. Since 2010, our renewable energy capacity has quadrupled, and right now there are 400,000 people in the UK working in low-carbon businesses. I have had the pleasure of seeing the benefits that renewable energy can bring first-hand in my constituency at the Sleaford renewable energy plant, which burns straw to generate enough energy for 65,000 homes and saves 150,000 tonnes of CO₂ per annum in the process. I believe that the Government's commitment to the environment is clear to see.

🕒 6.01pm

Sir Edward Davey >

(Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)

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I refer the House to my entry in the register, especially in relation to solar power and community renewable energy.

I have three small ideas for the House today: reform of capitalism, engagement in Europe and beyond, and the future of technology. On capitalism, when people say that we need a system change, they tend to be referring to a change in the energy system, but I think we need to be bolder and go wider. We need to reform our whole economic system, and that requires reform of capitalism. Nothing else will be a sufficient response to the young people protesting; nothing else will be radical enough. Decarbonising capitalism means reforming the rules for our banks, stock exchanges and pension funds to force them to take account of climate risk. If people think that is radical, well, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, agrees with it. Many people agree with it. We, and this Government, are getting behind the curve on the financial reforms we need. If we made them, we would radically transform the situation.

On European engagement, when I intervened on the Secretary of State earlier, I pointed out that Britain had led climate action at EU level. By winning stronger EU action, Britain influenced the United States and China, and through that we influenced the United Nations, and that led to the Paris climate treaty. Action at European level was critical for global action on climate change. As a Minister, I spent two and half years of very solid climate diplomacy across the EU, but a lot of it in Warsaw, because Poland was the issue. We worked with the Poles, we got a compromise, and we moved them over. Because of that, the whole of the EU adopted a greenhouse gas reduction target that the EU's Climate Change Commissioner had told me was impossible. We got right to the far end of our ambition, and it was Britain leading that ambition, not going down to the bottom, as is sometimes said about us in Europe. If we are at the table, we can make that difference. Brexit is a climate disaster in itself, because it is reducing this country's soft power and influence.

Finally, when I became Secretary of State, I was told by the *Daily Mail* and various other people that renewables were too expensive, and did I not know that the sun does not always shine and the wind does not always blow? Because of the policies we introduced, renewables are now the cheapest option, and that is fantastic for this country and the world. Intermittency, which is the other problem, is fast being solved through storage, interconnectors, the smart grid and demand-side response. If we add in tidal power and CCS, we can have the base load to sort out the problem relatively quickly. The solutions are there. We need the political will and determination to drive them through and meet this climate emergency.

Several hon. Members rose—

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Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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Order. I am afraid we have not done that well at my idea of Members voluntarily speaking for two minutes, so I am reducing the time limit to two minutes. I am sorry, but I want to get as many people in as possible.

🕒 6.05pm

Dr David Drew >

(Stroud) (Lab/Co-op)

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I shall rush what I have to say, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It may well help if we understand what we mean by “state of emergency”. Section 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 states that an emergency is

“an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom”.

It then lists those different events. I contend that we are in a state of emergency, and we should respond accordingly.

My main point is that we are here today because of Extinction Rebellion. People came to London—many of them from Stroud; some say that it was born out of Stroud—and they danced, sang, made speeches, got arrested, disrupted and stuck themselves to things, including my party leader's fence. It is important to understand that the protests were about bringing home to us what we should be doing—and what we are doing today—which is declaring a state of emergency, so that we genuinely do something about climate change.

We cannot park this until 2050. We need to do things now, over the next 10 years. We need to halve our carbon emissions over that time, to stand any chance of reaching our target by 2050. We have to stop fracking. We have to stop airport expansion. We have to end fossil fuel subsidies. One thing we have not talked a lot about today is waste disposal. Waste cannot be disposed of by a massive expansion of incineration, because that will add to our emissions. I hope we will get the message and do radical things, and then the people who came here and got arrested will have done it for a purpose.

Mike Gapes >

(Ilford South) (Change UK)

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On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may not be aware, but the Defence Secretary has just been sacked. Have you had any indication that the Prime Minister will be coming here to speak?

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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No, I have not, and we need to get on with the debate. I call Daniel Zeichner.

 6.07pm

Daniel Zeichner >

(Cambridge) (Lab)

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Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I think we were all impressed by the passion of the children across the country who have taken action over the last few weeks and those in Extinction Rebellion who had never been involved in protests before.

We can all talk about climate change, but seeing the evidence at first hand makes a real difference. I was fortunate to visit the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge last week, where Dr Huw Griffiths, who I was paired with in a Royal Society scheme and who was just back from the Antarctic, and Professor David Vaughan showed me their extraordinary ice cores. Ice cores are dug down deep into the ice, forming a pathway back into the past, with little bubbles from centuries past captured from the atmosphere. They are able to chart the rises and falls in temperature and emissions in the atmosphere and show exactly what has happened to our climate over the last few millennia. The chart shows temperatures going up and down, up and down, and we should be entering the cooling period, but the chart shows that temperatures are going up. That graphic representation makes it all clear.

That is why the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was so right last year to demand “rapid”, “unprecedented” and “far-reaching” transitions. We are not seeing that from the Government. For example, we have not seen cuts in road transport emissions, so why were the Government so pathetic in their response to suggestions that they look again at the fuel duty escalator? For goodness’ sake! It was introduced by a Conservative Government. Why was there such a negative response to Labour’s brave suggestion to restore our bus services by transferring money from vehicle excise duty? Those are the kinds of things that will make the difference—not honeyed words, as we heard from the Secretary of State, but rapid, unprecedented and far-reaching transitions. That is what we need.

 6.09pm

Faisal Rashid >

(Warrington South) (Lab)

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I want to remind Members why we are even here to debate the climate crisis in the first place. We are not here because of an international effort co-ordinated by world leaders, the recent cyclone in Mozambique or the increasing incidence of climate disasters wreaking havoc across our planet. We are here because, last August, a small group of schoolchildren decided to walk out of school to take a stand against climate change, and they have inspired a global movement. In one sense, this is testament to the great power of protest and a cause for hope in future generations, but it is also an indictment of our global political leadership. Frankly, it is an embarrassment that it should take a group of schoolchildren to pressure us to act.

The younger generations have exposed the abject failings of the world's decision makers. We saw these failings on display just last week, when the Secretary of State for International Trade seemed to legitimise climate change denial. His comments displayed a stunning level of ignorance about climate change—an ignorance that runs throughout the Tory party.

Make no mistake: climate change is happening at a terrifying pace. Only through urgent and co-ordinated action can we tackle this crisis. Doing nothing is simply not an option. I have been contacted by many of my constituents about this very issue. As the MP for Warrington South, I have called on Warrington Borough Council to declare an environment and climate emergency. In this country, we led the way in the industrial revolution, and it would be fitting if we were the architects of a green revolution today. Parliament must vote to declare a climate and environment emergency today.

🕒 6.11pm

Marsha De Cordova >

(Battersea) (Lab)

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It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. There can be no more denial, no more delay and no more hesitation. We are facing a climate emergency, and unless we take urgent action, climate chaos will wreak devastation in communities across the globe. Cuts to renewable energy mean that, on current trends, the UK will be carbon neutral only by the end of the century—more than 50 years too late.

This is too late for our children, and they know it. Children and young people have been leading the way on this. As the UK Student Climate Network recently wrote:

“We will be facing...climate breakdown...if those in power don't act urgently and radically to change our trajectory.”

We must hear these words. I pay tribute to the school climate strikers, along with Extinction Rebellion. More importantly, I want to pay tribute to the many students, children and young people in my constituency who have written to me about the climate crisis, particularly those from Alderbrook school. One year 6 student wrote to me that

“it is heartbreaking to know that our generation is going to suffer from the chaos that we haven't created.”

That is what will happen if we do not rise to this emergency because the science is clear.

The student strikers chanted

“system change, not climate change”,

and that is what we need—that is a fact. We need a green economy, investment in renewable energy and a ban on fracking, and we need to decarbonise our society. We need this for climate justice and for social justice. We need an economy that puts people and our planet before profit. This is an emergency, and we cannot afford to wait. We must act.

🕒 6.13pm

Catherine West >

(Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

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May I first put on record the excellent work of the Hornsey and Wood Green climate emergency activists—they invited me to a meeting well in advance of Greta Thunberg's visit and were ahead of the protesters—and the schoolchildren from schools in Hornsey and Wood Green who marched on London to demand change?

Transport is the most emitting sector of the UK economy, responsible for 27% of greenhouse gas emissions, and the figure increases to a staggering 40% if we include our share of international shipping and aviation. That is the one we can really do something about at the three levels of government. First, the Government must fund bus services—end of—and there is an election tomorrow where that will feature in big style.

Secondly, at local level, I was the council leader when we introduced the first 20 mph speed zone in London. At first it was considered ridiculous by the local papers, but it has now become rather fashionable. It is very much welcomed, for the sake of their lungs, by many young people and families.

Thirdly, I want to put on the record the work being done by the Mayor of London. That is not easy, as a lot of people will be affected. The ultra low emission zone in central London went live earlier this month. It is a very brave move, which later we will consider normal although at the moment it is a little uncomfortable. Well done to the Mayor and all our councillors who work so hard, day in, day out, on recycling, transport, cycling and all the things that make our environment better.

Finally, I want to put on the record the work being done on children's asthma and respiratory health by Ella Kissi-Debrah's mother, a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby). She has worked so hard to convince others of the importance of climate change and transport.

🕒 6.15pm

Jo Platt >

(Leigh) (Lab/Co-op)

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As a planet and as a country, we stand at a crossroads. In the month of Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg's visit to our country, and countless emails and conversations with constituents, we must ask whether we will use those interventions as a much needed wake-up call to take the urgent action we need. Alternatively, will we just make more excuses to create further delay and brush our country's future under the carpet once more?

We all agree that we need a cross-party approach to this crisis, but looking at this Government's record I fear that they are leading us down the path of excuse and delay. They have banned onshore wind subsidies, they are axing Labour's solar panel subsidies, and their attempts to reduce emissions have stalled.

Then we come to the Government's fracking policy. Fracking is a dangerous, disruptive and disastrous method of fuelling our country. It extracts fossil fuels at the expense of our environment and our communities, and the environmental risks from fracking to former coalfield sites are clear, so in Leigh we have expressed our total opposition to it—it does not have our consent, and the Government should follow Labour's lead and ban it.

In my constituency, the site of one former colliery is now a renowned 200-hectare country park and nature reserve, where over 230 species of bird have been identified. I suggest that sites such as that have been of greater benefit to our town than any fracking site could ever be. Rather than turning to the energy of old, we should be looking at how we reduce our emissions and help people to make greener choices. That starts with bringing railway stations back to our towns.

All this does not have to be burdensome; it can be full of hope, opportunity and positivity. But we must get on and act—the next generation is watching and judging.

🕒 6.17pm

Mohammad Yasin >

(Bedford) (Lab)

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Over six months ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that we had just 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe. The leading scientific experts in the world told us in no uncertain terms that urgent changes were needed to cut the risk of extreme heat, drought, floods and poverty. To put it another way, we should take urgent action before catastrophic life loss occurs. No such urgent action has taken place.

At the World Economic Forum in January, Sir David Attenborough told world leaders that we are destroying the natural world—and with it, ourselves. But no real urgent action followed. We have known for decades now that climate change was a threat to our planet. Many have devoted their lives to the climate change cause, to wake the world from its complacency and make it understand the gravity of the situation. But human beings are not great at planning and preparing for their future, and even less good at planning for the benefit of future generations.

I am very pleased that last month Bedford Borough Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency and committed to a six-month project to identify actions needed to achieve its 2030 carbon neutrality target. We heard from scientists who talked of the deafening sound of huge glaciers calving off the Greenland ice shelf and said that the current logging and burning of tropical forests releases more carbon dioxide than our remaining forests could possibly absorb.

I urge this Government, like Bedford Borough Council and other local authorities, to show true world leadership and declare a climate emergency. Nothing short of a green revolution will do. I am very happy to support the motion.

🕒 6.19pm

Hugh Gaffney >

(Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab)

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The UK Student Climate Network, the FridaysforFuture movement and Extinction Rebellion—these movements for climate action, driven by passion and activism, follow proud traditions of movements for change throughout our history, such as the trade unions. This week, the Communication Workers Union, at its annual conference in Bournemouth, also debated climate change.

I was pleased to see recently cross-party political talks. Positive commitments emerged from those talks. Sadly, there was no Prime Minister and no Conservative party representation.

To conclude, I want to reflect on a recent meeting I had with a young constituent of mine, Alexander. He had come to one of my surgeries in Moodiesburn concerned about the lack of action on climate change. He made an overnight journey last week from Moodiesburn to London to participate in the climate change protests. He said to me, rephrasing a quote from a world war two book he had read:

“Britain’s honour and its national interests are at stake. Our planet is under attack and there can be no further delays on declaring war on climate change, whatever the other nations decide to do.”

How right that statement is. There can be no further delays. We have to act now. It is time for the UK to declare a climate emergency.

🕒 6.21pm

Lyn Brown >

(West Ham) (Lab)

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On Monday, I was privileged to host students from the fabulous St Bonaventure’s boys school in my constituency, who are working with the East London Citizens Organisation and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, CAFOD, learning about politics and campaigning for social justice and a brighter future. They wanted to talk to me about housing, Brexit and the violence that has blighted our community, but most of all they wanted to talk to me about climate change. Their dedication and knowledge gave me hope.

Xavier told me that we need to stop trees being destroyed for developments in the UK. Ethan told me how important it is for us to invest more in research and development to produce the green innovations that will help us to reduce emissions. He wants to become a scientist and help with those challenges—I reckon he’ll do it. Arpon told me we needed to stop fracking and rely on renewables—not just because of the carbon consequences, but because of the impact on clean water and the local environment. Ethan—another Ethan—told me how inspired he is by the idea of a green new deal in the US, and what will make a green industrial revolution here. Thomas told me that we need so many, many more charging points for electric cars.

Thomas is right, Arpon is right, Xavier is right and Ethan—both Ethans—is right. What we need is a genuine commitment from the Government to act. Oceans rising, deforestation, wildfires, hundreds of millions at risk of flooding, displacement, drought, disease and starvation. Mass extinction, with huge numbers of species lost. That is what we face. We need a commitment to implement green policies on a scale that matches the enormous challenges that face us. Transformation of our economy, homes, transport, agriculture and energy systems. Transformation of our entire society, creating greater social justice as well as securing our very future on planet Earth. We know what we need to do. Let’s get on with it.

🕒 6.23pm

Liz Saville Roberts >

(Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)

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We have heard an awful lot about the various approaches we should be taking, but what we have not heard about—this is important—is the impact this is presently having on some of our communities. I am going to do what many MPs do—talk about my constituency. Do not switch off, because what is happening in Fairbourne will be happening in other communities around the United Kingdom and around Wales in the years to come.

The sea is rising 4.7 millimetres a year in Barmouth. That is not exclusive to Barmouth; it is happening everywhere. The spring tides—they do not just happen in spring, but occur 24 times a year—are now higher than the level of the land in Fairbourne. There are 470 properties, with 1,200 people living there. There is a masterplan, but it has very little budget and virtually no statutory power. Some reckon the sea defences, which cost £6 million over the past eight years, can protect for 40 years. It is reckoned that they can be protected at a cost of £10 million, but we do not know where those people or their houses will be in 40 years' time.

One person has understandably written to me, but she does not want her MP to talk about the challenges faced by Fairbourne. She says that the council and the environment authority are wrong, that the sea is not rising, and that, if it is, that is an unmitigated disaster for everyone, so there is no point in doing anything at all. To quote from recent correspondence:

“Fairbourne is a happy and friendly place to live and everyone gets on with life. So please don't go stirring up old news now.”

Après moi, le déluge.

Hon. Members can see the political incentive to keep quiet. The easiest thing to do would be to keep my head down, save for the fact that that is the crux of the problem with our short-termism, our self-interest politics. Fairbourne is what a climate change emergency looks like. It is slow, but it is happening, and we have little response to it.

🕒 6.25pm

Tommy Sheppard >

(Edinburgh East) (SNP)

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In the 1970s, as a teenager, I first got involved in political activity through campaigning on the environment and against nuclear power. It is amazing the change that has happened since. Then we were dismissed as cranks and eccentrics; now that thinking is mainstream.

However, understand that the question now is not whether human activity threatens the survival of the planet. It is not even whether we need to do more to curb that activity. The question before us now is whether it is even possible for us to accelerate what we are doing in order to avoid a tipping point, when the damage becomes irreversible and the downward trajectory unstoppable. That point does not come in 2050; it comes in about 10 years' time. That is why this is an emergency and why the Government need to do more.

Let me give a couple of examples of where the Government should do more. I eat red meat. I should eat less of it—as we all should. However, hon. Members can go into any supermarket in this country and buy a kilo of beef for less than a kilo of green beans. We need the Government to take action with our food producers, using every lever at their disposal, including tax, subsidy and regulation, to make sure that families in this country can eat nutritious food with a low-carbon footprint without putting themselves at an economic disadvantage.

Another example is that I come to this place by train from Edinburgh, but only because the taxpayers pay the fare. If they did not, I would have the same dilemma as everyone else in my constituency, because on any day of the week it is cheaper to fly from Edinburgh to London than to take the train. That is a ludicrous and unsustainable situation. To cure it, we need a radical and rapid expansion of public transport in this country, the like of which will give the Minister nightmares. Not enough is being done; I am sorry to break with the consensual backslapping. Things need to change, and we need the Government to do more.

🕒 6.27pm

Ruth Cadbury >

(Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)

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I heard Greta Thunberg speak at the meeting here last week, where, on behalf of her generation, she demanded that we declare a climate crisis and take serious, effective action based on what scientists tell us. At that meeting, and again today, we heard lots of warm words from the Environment Secretary, but he is always weak on new action. If this country is to justify our reputation as world leaders in carbon reduction and on the environment, far more needs to be done.

I have time for three points. First, the Government should reverse the decision to build a third runway at Heathrow, which will add 6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, making Heathrow the biggest emitter of CO₂ in the UK, as well as adding yet more to local air pollution. As Department for Transport analysis shows, it will produce no net benefit to the economy anyway.

Secondly, we have seen good work on air pollution by London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has just introduced the ultra low emission zone and who took the Government to court over their illegal air pollution plans. However, we need Government intervention to help the Mayor and other forward-thinking local leaders, including by initiating scrappage schemes and significantly investing in and supporting clean and green solutions for transport and for waste and recycling.

Thirdly, I suggest that the Government support and listen to a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice. The Government plan to take us out of the EU, which has, among its other environmental policies, ensured that UK beaches are now clean and pollution free. At the same time, they will roll out the red carpet for President Trump, who claims that global warming is a hoax and has pulled the US out of the Paris agreement. On the climate and environmental crises, let the warm words be matched by serious action.

 6.29pm**Mr Paul Sweeney >**

(Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op)

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On behalf of my constituents, I want to declare a climate change emergency. I have received compelling correspondence about the need for us to declare one, 10 years before we see irreversible change to our climate the likes of which we will not be able to comprehend. I was struck by the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), who said we needed a national mission of the likes we have never seen before to solve this problem. We need to grasp it in the same way the Americans did with the space race. We need to set national targets to decarbonise and be the first nation to truly enter the green era of industrialisation.

The nation that I represent, Scotland, was the first to industrialise in the industrial revolution. It saw the most rapid industrialisation of any country in the world. We will have to adopt the same sort of bigger imagination and purpose if we are to achieve that, but I am afraid that the Government at all levels are singularly failing to grasp the urgency and the burning need to adapt radically. On the one hand, I hear great rhetoric, but on the other hand, I see valuable projects in my constituency being defunded, such as the climate challenge funding for housing associations and other local organisations. In one breath, the Scottish Government are declaring a climate emergency, which I welcome, while also defunding local projects in my constituency.

Likewise, I would like to see a national project to fully develop public transport across our country. It is a critical issue that is causing social dislocation. We have seen privatisation and fragmentation of our public transport system in this country. Why are we not seeing a radical project to re-municipalise, reintegrate and establish affordable, convenient and comprehensive public transport across the country? That would be the radical change needed. We could utilise it to grow our industrialise base as well. We have huge capability in bus manufacturing in this country. Let us, for example, set a target to be the first nation to have completely decarbonised bus travel across this country. Labour has made a radical proposal for a totally free and comprehensive bus service across the whole of Scotland. That is the sort of radical thinking we need, and we need it now. The Government need to act.

 6.31pm**Alex Sobel >**

(Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op)

The IPCC said we had until 2030 to avoid a 1.5° rise in global temperatures. We must get to net zero carbon by 2030 at the latest, not by the Government's target of 2050. How do we get there? What must be done? First, we need to repurpose the Treasury and economic policy. In the short term, all Government spending, priorities and programmes should be assessed against our climate goals. The next spending review needs to be a climate emergency spending review. Too little of Government spending is on climate change priorities. By contrast, 25% of the EU's budget for 2021-27 will be climate related.

We must underpin an industrial retooling of our whole country and our productive output for the 21st century. Many of my colleagues call that the green new deal—a reimagining of FDR's great rebuilding of America—but I call it a Marshall plan for the environment. We must work alongside our European partners to build a new, clean, fossil-free Europe.

The UK also needs to account for its exported carbon. The Government claim to have achieved the world's sharpest decline in emissions, but what about the embedded emissions in our all products? The sustainability research institute at the University of Leeds has developed a model to reallocate those emissions from industries to the final consumers of products. This model, developed by John Barrett and Anne Owen, is a world leader in terms of working out the UK's carbon footprint. Will the Secretary of State meet them and adopt this model?

Finally, we need a new climate economics. The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate concludes that the choice between tackling climate change and boosting economic growth is a false choice. Instead, it says that economic growth and reducing emissions are mutually beneficial. Fitoussi, Stiglitz and Sen, three of the best economists in the world, have done substantial work for the French Government to measure societal wellbeing in ways that go beyond traditional measures such as an economy's GDP. The UK Government need to look at measures that supersede gross domestic product and focus on solving our climate emergency.

🕒 6.33pm

Liz McInnes >

(Heywood and Middleton) (Lab)

We have heard many claims from Government Members about the progress that the Government have made on climate change, but the fact is they have systemically demolished the policies put in place under the Climate Change Act 2008, introduced by a Labour Government, and increased public spending on fossil fuels. We all remember David Cameron's "Let's get rid of the green crap" comment. He began the process of comprehensive policy reversal. This was accelerated by the current Prime Minister, who famously, on her second day in office, showed her commitment to tackling climate change by abolishing the Department.

The International Monetary Fund reported in 2015 that the UK had spent £26 billion on fossil fuel subsidies in 2015, much of that going overseas, since 85% of the UK's coal demand was being met through imports. In 2015, the UK subsidised fossil fuels to the tune of three to four times what it spent on renewables, contributing in the process to catastrophic global climate change effects.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth agrees that action on climate change is necessary. A month ago, however, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), about the UK's woeful performance in relation to the Aichi biodiversity targets. In 2010, we pledged to meet the 20 targets by 2020—next year—but we are on track to meet just five of them. We are falling down particularly on target 20, which relates to the mobilisation of financial resources. Although they signed up to those targets, the Government now describe them as "nebulous", and are talking about the next set of targets. As one of my constituents said,

"they are ignoring the targets, but looking forward to Britain being ahead in the next set of targets... Is this parliament or a sketch from the Tracy Ullman show?"

🕒 6.35pm

Stephen Twigg >

(Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op)

Let me begin by endorsing the idea of a citizens' assembly on climate change. Such an assembly would present us with a real opportunity to put aside party politics and deliver a real mandate for action on climate change. The Irish citizens' assembly recently looked into the issue. It faced up to some difficult trade-offs, but the consensus reached by that group of citizens from across Irish society provides a strong public mandate for renewed efforts to tackle climate change. I urge the Government to consider establishing an assembly here in the UK to give citizens a voice in this fight.

Liverpool has set the bold aim of becoming the world's first climate positive city by the end of 2020. It will seek to remove more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits each year. The city council is working with the Poseidon Foundation to help to offset its carbon emissions by incorporating blockchain technology in the council's day-to-day operations.

Last summer, the International Development Committee started an inquiry into UK aid for combating climate change, and yesterday we agreed to publish our report next week. Climate change cuts across everything, and the effectiveness of all UK aid spending depends on addressing it. We have been struck by the Government's incoherent approach, especially in relation to the support given to fossil fuels by UK Export Finance. Global Witness told us that that was leading to circumstances in which

"the UK government is providing climate aid with one hand, and exporting the UK's fossil fuel pollution with the other, all the while undermining its climate action credentials".

We need coherence and consistency. It is incumbent on the Government today to respond to the climate emergency in both their domestic and their international policy, so that we can ensure that combating climate change is at the front and centre of everything we do.

Debate interrupted.