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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 30 September 2026

[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:30]

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice and Housing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The first portfolio this afternoon is social justice and housing. I remind members that questions 3 to 5 have been grouped and that I will take any supplementary questions on them after all three have been answered. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Housing Policy (Western Isles)

1. Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to ensure that housing policy supports population retention and growth in the Western Isles, in light of concerns reportedly raised by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar regarding barriers to housing delivery. (S7O-00309)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government's national islands plan has population retention and attraction at its heart. It includes a commitment to deliver more affordable homes and complements our rural and islands housing action plan, which recognises housing as fundamental to supporting sustainable communities.

We are backing that ambition with significant investment in rural and islands housing. Through our affordable housing supply programme, we are providing £38 million to the council over four years, alongside demand-led support through the £370 million rural and islands housing fund and the £25 million rural affordable homes for key workers fund, which will help communities to retain and attract the people they need.

Donald MacKinnon: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has highlighted to the cabinet secretary its frustration that the resource planning assumption that it has been provided with through the affordable housing supply programme is at risk of being unspent in future years due to the restrictions of the current model. Meanwhile, the comhairle has identified a number of opportunities that could deliver much-needed housing in my constituency, including investment in the croft house grant scheme, the potential for support for private self-builds and home improvement, and shared equity development. Will the cabinet secretary commit to further exploring the possibility of providing flexibility with those funding streams, to meeting the comhairle and to taking a more holistic approach to the delivery of housing in rural and island areas?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I welcome Donald MacKinnon's question. I think that I have already written to the council with an offer to meet it. The material that it sent me included various proposals on how to tackle the issue.

In the meantime, I assure Donald MacKinnon that we are keen to consider how we can use our funds to benefit all parts of Scotland. For example, there is a specific workstream on how our agency will help rural and islands communities, and we are ensuring that our rural and islands grants are delivering what people want, with the criteria matching what people need the funds to do.

I will double check, but I am pretty sure that that meeting should be in my diary or on its way to being in my diary. I look forward to updating Donald MacKinnon on those issues, and perhaps catching up with him in the future, should he wish me to do so.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): The Scottish Government's commitment is to deliver, by 2032, 110,000 affordable homes, 70 per cent of which will be available for social rent and 10 per cent of which will be in rural and islands communities. What progress is being made towards delivering that 10 per cent in our rural and islands communities?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are committed to that target for 2032, particularly the target for rural and islands communities. Between 23 March 2022 and the end of 2025, we delivered 28,536 affordable homes, of which 5,890 were in such communities. That represents about 20 per cent of the affordable homes that were delivered during that period, so we significantly exceeded the 10 per cent target. As I said to Donald MacKinnon, we are challenging ourselves to ensure that our funding streams work for all parts of Scotland, including our rural and islands communities.

Homelessness (Local Authority Acquisition and Buy-back Schemes)

The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.

2. David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, in that I am a councillor in Fife.

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the effectiveness of its support for local authority acquisition and buy-back schemes in reducing homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation. (S7O-00310)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government recognises the important role that acquisitions and buy-back schemes can play in increasing affordable housing supply and helping households move from temporary to permanent accommodation. Based on management information, Fife has benefited significantly from the £120 million targeted acquisition programme. In total, there has been more than £6.2 million of investment over two years to help to deliver 99 social rented homes for the people of Fife. Acquisitions continue to be supported through the affordable housing supply programme and are targeted according to local housing needs identified by the council.

David Barratt: Fife lost about 40,000 council houses due to the right-to-buy scheme. Despite Scottish Government funding and support to acquire homes and expand social housing stock, only a fraction of those losses have been replaced. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, although the Scottish Government has provided the means to act, Labour-run Fife Council has failed to grasp the opportunity to expand acquisitions of former council houses?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank David Barratt for raising two important issues. One is the recognition, which the Government made a long time ago, of the impact of the right to buy. I am pleased that the Prime Minister is now looking to end the grip of that in the English system.

The member also points to the important area of acquisitions. The reason that Fife Council has taken those steps is, in large part, because we had a dedicated fund for it. I am disappointed that the Labour local administration did not see the benefit of that before that fund came to fruition, despite the Scottish National Party's grip on the council, which ensured that the point was made. I hope that the council will continue with acquisitions as part of its affordable housing supply programme, because it is an important aspect of how we can deliver more homes and do so quickly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind members that questions and answers should be short.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): In Edinburgh, provision of temporary accommodation is still falling far short of what is needed. Last September, the Scottish Government updated the housing emergency action plan, which included a request for local authorities in Scotland proactively to contact all relevant households to discuss the option of flipping their temporary accommodation property to permanent where appropriate. That was to be accompanied by a fund to help replenish temporary housing that had been flipped. What progress has been made in delivering on the commitment to help replenish temporary accommodation lost to flipping, including any funding allocated and any guidance issued to councils?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Flipping tenancies is another important aspect of this issue, as well as acquisitions. Some councils do that tremendously well and others do not. I recognise that the council in Edinburgh now has a strategy and a route map to tackle the temporary accommodation issue, and flipping is one of the areas in that strategy. The member will be aware that it is for City of Edinburgh Council to work with its registered social landlord partners on how that can be taken forward.

I would be happy to provide the member with further details of that in writing.

Homelessness

3. Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest annual homelessness statistics. (S7O-00311)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Homelessness figures remain far too high, which is why we are shifting our approach from crisis management to prevention and rapid rehousing. Through our £50 million homelessness prevention fund, the £115 million investment in discretionary housing payments, the £2 million fund to leave scheme and the delivery of 1,500 housing first tenancies, we are supporting people before they reach crisis point. Our investment of up to £4.9 billion will also support the delivery of 36,000 affordable homes.

With pressures rising across the United Kingdom, I urge the UK Government to scrap the local housing allowance freeze and its plans to defund councils to address home office policy failures.

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Paul McLennan: Homelessness charities such as Crisis have warned that Scotland's homelessness statistics will remain stubbornly high without considerable focus and investment in homelessness prevention. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is necessary? Can she advise what the Scottish Government is doing to implement meaningful change in delivering homelessness prevention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In my original answer I mentioned some of the work that we are doing. The reason that we are investing in homelessness prevention is to support people before they experience crisis. We do that through £30.5 million of prevention activity through the local government settlement, and we have made a record £115 million-worth of discretionary housing payments this year.

Paul McLennan will be well aware of the policies and provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 relating to the ask-and-act duty, which Crisis was absolutely pivotal in developing and ensuring were included in the legislation. I look forward to working with Crisis to ensure that the policy and legislation that we have passed on the ask-and-act duty come to fruition, are implemented, and have the impact that we all want them to have.

Homelessness (Households in Temporary Accommodation)

4. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the latest homelessness statistics showing that 19,004 households are in temporary accommodation, the highest recorded figure, whether it considers that it has met its 2023 commitment to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2026. (S7O-00312)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The latest statistics show the scale of the challenge that we face in tackling homelessness. Although the pressures are not unique to Scotland, we are taking decisive action to prevent homelessness and reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

As I mentioned in response to Paul McLennan, we have shifted our approach from crisis management to prevention and rapid rehousing. Our £50 million homelessness prevention fund and the delivery of 1,500 housing first tenancies will support people before they reach crisis.

Liam Kerr: It is appalling that homelessness is at record levels, but the fact that there are now almost 4,000 more households in temporary accommodation than when the Government published its paper on "Reducing the use of temporary accommodation" puts the failure right at the door of this Scottish National Party Government. How much responsibility does the Government take for the ambition that was set out in that paper having failed? Given this Government's apparent inability to arrest the increase, does the evidence point towards further rises by March 2027?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are absolutely determined to do everything that we can, as I have mentioned, both in the preventative space and through the supply of affordable homes, to help people out of temporary accommodation. That is exactly why we have committed £4.9 billion to building more homes and to our continued work on homelessness prevention.

I would have more time for the anxiety that the member is expressing today if, at any point during our budget processes, he had argued that we should spend more on housing and homelessness issues. He shakes his head, but coming here to say that more should be done, while never challenging the Government to provide more funding in that area, makes for a slightly less useful discussion between the member and me. If he wishes to have that discussion in the run-up to this budget, he would be more than welcome to do so; my door is open.

Homelessness

5. James Adams (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to its annual homelessness statistics, which show that homelessness is at its highest recorded level in many parts of the country. (S7O-00313)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are taking action to tackle homelessness and accelerate housing supply, including by investing up to £4.9 billion over four years to support delivery of 36,000 affordable homes. The best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from happening, and we are investing heavily in preventative measures, including our homelessness prevention fund.

We will continue to do everything that we can, and we will ensure that we work with the United Kingdom Government, if it is willing to work with us, to address its failures on the local housing allowance and Home Office policy.

James Adams: I agree that preventing homelessness from happening in the first place is the most effective way to end it for good.

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As it stands, 15 pilot schemes are being run to test new homelessness prevention duties that were introduced as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025. Those end in December, with evaluation of the pilots not due until the following summer. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it would be a waste if those successful pilots were forced to pause until the evaluation has been carried out? Will funding be made available for the pilots to continue and operate into next year?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Evaluation of the pilot schemes continues. It is already clear from the pilots that some of the work can lead to permanent changes in service provision and ways of working. Rather than having to be extended and additional funding for them having to be provided, the schemes are demonstrating that changes to our ways of working and our systems approach can be embedded in current services. I appreciate that that might not be the case in every area, but that is exactly why I am keen, as I mentioned to Paul McLennan, to work with Crisis and others to take forward the learning from those pilot schemes and see what lessons we can learn for the future.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): The homelessness crisis has been exacerbated by the failure to build more homes. In the year to 2026, the number of completions was down 11 per cent when it was supposed to be going in the other direction. Does the cabinet secretary accept that we have a problem with ensuring access to land that we can actually build houses on?

We have the houses on paper, but in terms of them being viable for construction, we have a serious problem. Can the cabinet secretary set out what steps she is taking to ensure that more land is available to build houses on?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Willie Rennie is quite right to challenge me on the issue of overall build numbers, but we have clearly seen a quite substantial uptick in the number of approvals and starts through the affordable housing supply programme, for example. Only today, I met Homes for Scotland to talk about that and other issues, including access to land. I attended that meeting with Hannah Mary Goodlad, in recognition of the interplay between housing and planning.

We have already worked on issues—I have repeated my ask to work jointly with Homes for Scotland—involving sites where planning permission has been given but development is not taking place. I have invited it to work with us in an open-book fashion to test the viability of some of those projects and to see why they are not happening. Is it an issue to do with planning? Is it an issue to do with something in the public sector? Is it an issue to do with financial viability? What funds are available?

In the light of this morning's meeting, I reassure Willie Rennie of the work that we are doing, which I will keep him updated on, as I am sure that stakeholders will.

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): I appreciate the cabinet secretary's candid responses, but we have to be honest about the scale of the challenge that the country faces. A record 10,715 children now live in temporary accommodation. What urgent action will the Government take to address that crisis, and will the cabinet secretary commit to providing additional support in areas such as Glasgow and Edinburgh where the crisis is large?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Although I absolutely recognise the challenges highlighted by the statistics that were published on homelessness, I point to the fact that, in 2025-26, the number of children who were associated with homelessness applications had decreased by 10 per cent when compared to the figure for 2024-25. I hope that that is the start of our preventative measures having an impact and preventing homelessness from happening in the first place. I hope that Iris Duane agrees that that is the right thing to do.

The number of children in temporary accommodation is far too high and the length of time that they spend in it is far too long. That is exactly why we are looking at what more can be done to assist families with children, particularly larger families or those who find it difficult to move out of temporary accommodation because of the type of accommodation that they need, and to help local authorities with the most challenging cases. I am giving very serious consideration to how we address that, and I would welcome Iris Duane's thoughts on it as we look to next year's budget.

Home Adaptations for Disabled People

6. Amanda Lindsay (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what immediate steps it will take to reduce waiting times for home adaptations to ensure that disabled people are allocated properties that meet their individual needs. (S7O-00314)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government recognises the vital role that timely housing adaptations play in enabling disabled people to live independently in homes that meet their needs.

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The overall responsibility for the planning and delivery of adaptations lies with integration joint boards. The Scottish Government is taking action to support improvements by reviewing the adaptations system to identify opportunities to streamline processes and better target resources; improving the accessibility of new homes through our updated housing for varying needs guidance and the development of a new Scottish accessible home standard; and protecting the £20.9 million budget for adaptations in registered social landlord properties.

Local authorities and RSLs are responsible for their allocations policies and should take account of individual housing needs.

Amanda Lindsay: There is emerging evidence that disabled people are being offered homes that they cannot use, with some wheelchair users left trapped in multistorey blocks by unreliable lifts. The cabinet secretary will know that the complexity of the adaptations funding system varies by tenure and is widely seen as a barrier that keeps disabled people out of the private rented sector and limits their choice and control. Will she commit to simplifying that system, publish waiting times data by local authority and ensure that the forthcoming research from Citizens Advice Scotland, the Glasgow Disability Alliance and Shelter Scotland is acted on rather than simply noted?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am pretty sure that I have a meeting in my diary with those organisations to discuss that publication in due course. The member has asked for something that I am already doing. I said in my original answer that we are reviewing the adaptations system to identify opportunities to streamline the process and better target resources. I hope that I can reassure the member that, as I said in my original answer, that review is being undertaken.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): It would be helpful if questions and answers could be shorter to enable more backbench questioners to be brought in.

Homelessness (Veterans)

7. Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to meet the housing needs of veterans who are either at risk of becoming or have already become homeless. (S7O-00315)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Scotland has the strongest housing and homelessness rights of anywhere in the United Kingdom. Anyone who is at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including veterans, is entitled to help to secure a permanent home or temporary accommodation if they need it in the short term. This year, we are providing councils across Scotland with £15.7 billion to fund local services, including homelessness services. Recent homelessness statistics showed an 8 per cent decrease in the number of veterans being assessed as homeless in Scotland. Although the numbers are still too high, that decrease is a sign that our actions are having a positive impact for veterans.

Julie MacDougall: The region of Fife is not just my home but home to one of the highest populations of veterans in Scotland. I have had the opportunity to speak with veterans, both last week at Holyrood and in visits across my region, many of whom have reflected the opinions that were expressed by the Scottish Veterans Commissioner in her report this month. She was disappointed by the Scottish Government's "limited progress" in supporting our veterans, not just on housing but on their economic security and health and mental wellbeing. The Scots who fought for our country deserve better. Does the Scottish Government agree?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is worth highlighting that, of the 24 recommendations in the veterans homelessness prevention pathway, three are completed and 17 are in progress for completion. My officials have worked with the Veterans Scotland housing group to identify the five top key priorities for the pathway recommendations, and we will continue to work with partners, including Veterans Scotland and the commissioner, to ensure that progress is made against those recommendations, both to prevent homelessness and to improve housing outcomes for veterans.

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): In my constituency of Renfrewshire North and Cardonald, Erskine Veterans Charity provides an invaluable range of services, including a modernised model that delivers diverse housing options and support that is tailored to veterans' needs. What further actions is the Scottish Government taking in collaboration with veterans charities such as Erskine to meet the evolving needs of veterans across Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I join Michelle Campbell in recognising the invaluable contribution that Erskine and other veterans organisations make across Scotland. She points to the important work that they do. Another example of the work that the Government is doing in the area is that we fund Housing Options Scotland, which provides specialist housing information and advice, including for veterans. That partnership approach helps to ensure that services evolve to meet the changing needs of veterans and their families. It is important that we provide that funding but also work alongside charities such as Erskine.

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Poverty (No Wrong Door Approach)

8. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its proposed approach to addressing poverty, no wrong door, will ensure that families experiencing financial hardship receive joined-up support at the earliest opportunity. (S7O-00316)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are committed to families receiving support when and where they need it and for as long as they need it, and our commitment to whole-family support is underlined by approaches such as no wrong door, which supports partners to take preventative action and ensure that families who are experiencing financial hardship receive joined-up and tailored wraparound support at the earliest opportunity.

Our tackling child poverty delivery plan sets out a range of actions to deliver that support, including the introduction of a £20 million fund for third sector organisations, for this and future years on a multiyear basis, to enable local-led delivery.

Collette Stevenson: Families who experience financial hardship often need to navigate multiple agencies and services and retell their situation multiple times. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to community-based key workers, who can support people to access all the support that they are entitled to as quickly as possible, which avoids exacerbating an already stressful situation. Will the cabinet secretary outline how that provision will be expanded, including in East Kilbride? Will she also set out how the impact of the no wrong door approach will be monitored and how it will tackle the scourge of child poverty?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Collette Stevenson raises an important point, because that issue is public service reform in action. She is right to point out that, over time, the public sector has become complicated and therefore complex for people to find their way around. The whole family wellbeing funding that is being provided to South Lanarkshire, which is estimated to be just over £10 million, supports a shift towards prevention and early intervention, changing the way that we provide services to people. I am delighted that family support hubs now operate in four localities, including in East Kilbride, and I hope that the member is reassured that the Government is fully committed to that type of work, which I am sure will have a positive impact on her constituents.

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I hear from families in Uddingston and Bellshill who are facing a range of pressures, on issues such as housing, household costs, employment, childcare and access to addiction services, all at the same time. How will the no wrong door approach ensure that families who present with one problem are not simply signposted elsewhere but get help to identify and address the wider issues that they are facing?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Steven Bonnar is right to point out that, to date, public services—with the best of intent—have often provided signposting. That is welcome, but it is not enough, nor is it anywhere near holistic whole family support. That is why it is important that we seek to change the way that we deliver public services, and that is the right thing to do for the people who we are here to serve.

We need to move past signposting or referrals in order to deliver whole family support in a holistic setting that recognises that—as Steven Bonnar said—although an individual may present with one issue or challenge, there could potentially be many issues behind that. Providing such holistic support will help that individual or family from getting into a crisis. It is right for families and it is the best and most effective way of delivering public services.

First Homes Fund

9. Jenny Young (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the uptake of the first homes fund since its introduction. (S7O-00317)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): To date, a total of 493 applications have been submitted to the demand-led first homes fund, and it continues to support more first-time buyers into home ownership. The Scottish Government continues to closely monitor uptake of the fund and assess its effectiveness in supporting first-time buyers into home ownership. As part of our ongoing evaluation of the scheme and as we approach phase 2 of its delivery, we are identifying lessons that have been learned and working with partners to further improve accessibility and ensure that the fund reaches those whom it is intended to support.

The first homes fund remains part of our wider package of support for first time buyers, which also includes the open market shared equity scheme. That is also open for applications.

Jenny Young: In its manifesto, the Scottish National Party pledged to help 2,000 people with the first homes fund in the first 100 days after the election. The cabinet secretary has just confirmed that there have

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been 493 applications, which is less than a quarter of that target. Crucially, the scheme is not actually doing anything to encourage house building or increase supply, which is so critical for the housing emergency.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Andy Burnham has announced an equivalent scheme that will enable people to purchase new-build properties with a 2.5 per cent deposit, supported by a 20 per cent Government equity loan. The United Kingdom Government scheme will be only for new builds, so it will encourage house building and increase the supply of homes, which is needed across the UK. Will the cabinet secretary look at the scheme that Andy Burnham has announced and consider what lessons can be learned to properly address Scotland's housing emergency?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I do not know whether Andy Burnham looked north, saw that the Scottish Government has taken action to support first-time buyers and realised that he should perhaps do so himself. I am a bit puzzled by the suggestion that we should restrict the scheme, if that is the proposition that Jenny Young thinks that we should take forward. As I said to Willie Rennie, I have just met Homes for Scotland, which welcomed the delivery of the first homes fund. I have visited developments that have literally been in the middle of being developed and been told by developers that they are looking forward to the impact that the fund could have on the new-build and improving markets.

I will take seriously what the member has said, but I will also take seriously what I have been told by developers who think that the fund will make a difference. As I said, phase 2 is coming up, and we are considering possible improvements. I am listening to developers—including today—on how we can work on the scheme for phase 2.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind members that questions and answers must be short.

Affordable Homes

10. Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce barriers and to support housing providers to accelerate the delivery of affordable homes across Scotland. (S7O-00318)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government is taking a range of actions to reduce barriers and accelerate the delivery of affordable homes across Scotland. That includes the introduction of a targeted voids and acquisitions fund, working with the sector to clarify guidance on the flipping of temporary accommodation to permanent housing, and confirming the largest ever multiyear budget for housing of up to £4.9 billion.

Looking ahead, we are reforming the planning system to speed up development, as well as establishing, from April 2027, more homes Scotland, which will be focused on speed, simplicity and scale.

Dawn Black: I recently met Angus Housing Association and Caledonia Housing Association, as well as Scotia Homes in Brechin, which is delivering affordable homes locally with Scottish Government support, and they all told me that differing planning requirements across different local authority areas are causing delays, increasing costs and making it harder to get much-needed homes built.

What action can the cabinet secretary and her ministers take to ensure that planning departments do not get in the way of achieving the Government's housing targets?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In Scotland, we have a plan-led system that takes an evidence-based approach to development that is led through the national planning framework and the local development plans. Our system also has essential flexibility built into it to ensure that planning authorities can react to changing circumstances.

Over the past year, ministers and the chief planner have written to planning authorities to reiterate the need for an emergency-led approach to plan preparation and decision making. I reassure the member that, in addition, over the summer, the Minister for Public Finance engaged with a number of stakeholders, and that, as we committed to do in our programme for government, we will shortly consult on targeted reforms that will tackle concerns about efficiency and complexity. I am sure that some of the issues that Dawn Black raises will be considered as part of that process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That brings to an end the questions on the social justice and housing portfolio. I remind members that it would be helpful if questions and answers could be shorter to enable me to bring in more back benchers; I was unable to bring in quite a number of members on the previous portfolio.

Economy, Tourism and Transport

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next portfolio is economy, tourism and transport. I remind members that questions 3 and 8 are grouped together and that I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered.

If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. I again remind members that questions and answers should be brief.

Public Transport (Central Scotland and Lothians West)

1. Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the limited evening and Sunday bus provision in some parts of Central Scotland and Lothians West, whether it will commit to working with local authorities and bus operators to ensure that communities currently without adequate services have access to reliable and affordable public transport throughout the week, including evenings and weekends. (S7O-00319)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I think that all members would sympathise with the desire of those in the member's area to have better services in place. Ultimately, such matters are primarily a consideration for commercial operators and, indeed, for the local authority. I must express my surprise at having been asked by a Reform MSP for direct state intervention in that regard, because that runs somewhat contrary to the narrative from her party leadership.

Amanda Bland: Thank you for that response. [Laughter.]

What proportion of the funding provided through the Government's £55 million bus infrastructure fund for 2026-27 will benefit communities in Central Scotland and Lothians West?

Stephen Flynn: This is a fantastic opportunity for me to outline the investment that we are making in our public services, which is incredibly important to us. Of course, we have put a considerable amount of money into ensuring that we have a £2 bus fare cap in 60 per cent of Scotland, and we provide national concessionary cards to our young people, our older people and our disabled people. However, it is also important to have buses that run in a timely fashion, which is why we are providing £55 million to improve bus infrastructure across Scotland, and we continue to work very closely with local authorities in that regard.

Again, though, that investment in our public infrastructure appears to run contrary to the aims and objectives of Reform UK as a party, and the member could perhaps reflect on that in future contributions.

Eden Project (Dundee)

2. Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is planning to support the proposed Eden Project development in Dundee through to delivery. (S7O-00320)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Eden Project represents a significant opportunity to build on Dundee's status as a world-class visitor destination. The Scottish Government recognises the potential that a project of this kind can have in contributing to our ambitions for local and regional economic growth, and we are committed to working with the project partners to explore how we can best contribute to the project's development.

Heather Anderson: Last year, Dundee City Council found that more tourists visited Dundee in 2024 than in any other year in the previous decade, generating £333 million-worth of economic benefit for the economy in Dundee and supporting 3,500 jobs in the city. Our goal is for Dundee to be recognised as Europe's best emerging city break destination by 2030.

The minister has recognised the key role that the Eden Project will play in achieving our ambitions for tourism. Will he be willing to visit Dundee to hear more about the project's plans and, specifically, how it can help to extend overnight stays?

Tom Arthur: I thank Heather Anderson for her question, and I agree with her outline of the significant strength of the visitor economy in Dundee and, of course, the opportunity for it to grow. I would be more than delighted to come to Dundee and engage with the member and other stakeholders. In fact, I have already had a meeting with the leader of Dundee City Council, at which we discussed a range of issues with regard to economic development opportunities, including the Eden Project. Senior officials will have further dialogue with the local authority in the coming weeks and months, and I am certainly happy to ensure that the member is fully engaged with that, too.

I should also state that the Deputy First Minister has also agreed to meet the Eden Project partners, which again demonstrates the Government's commitment to engaging and supporting the project.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): On a visit to the project site in April, the First Minister said that the Eden Project offered

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“an important opportunity to engage people in our transition to a net-zero future.”

What role does the Scottish Government see for the Eden Project in Dundee in building public support for and understanding of net zero, and in delivering a greener economy for our future?

Tom Arthur: The member has raised a really important point, and obviously, the Eden Project can play a vital role in that respect. I should share with the member that, just this morning, I visited Edinburgh zoo to discuss these very matters, recognising the importance of the action that we are taking this week to redouble our efforts on climate and, indeed, to address the risks to biodiversity posed by a changing climate. Education plays such an important part in ensuring that we not only maintain but build consent and social licence, and I think that the Eden Project can clearly play an important part in contributing to that agenda.

Bus and Haulage Sector (Decarbonisation)

3. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the bus and haulage sector to decarbonise. (S7O-00321)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I am more than happy to answer that. Through the Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund—ScotZEB—and its predecessor scheme, we have invested almost £200 million to support over 1,100 low and zero-emission buses. We also run the heavy goods vehicle market readiness fund. However, I am sure that the irony of a Reform UK member talking about decarbonisation will not be lost on the chamber.

Graham Simpson: Well, we could do without the snotty responses.

Hydrogen could be an important part of our future energy mix, but progress in using it as a zero-emission fuel has stalled. The United Kingdom Government-backed HyHAUL project has closed, and Glasgow-based Hydrogen Vehicle Systems has gone into administration. Given the public investment in developing hydrogen and zero-emission heavy vehicle capability in Scotland, what assessment has the Scottish Government made of the outcomes and lessons from that investment to date? What role does it now see for hydrogen for HGVs in Scotland? Finally, can it provide an update on the current status of the low-carbon transport applications centre? Serious questions demand serious answers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): And there were quite a number of questions there, Mr Simpson. Questions, and answers, must be kept short.

Stephen Flynn: The truth hurts, Mr Simpson.

I assume that Mr Simpson is referring to potential green hydrogen opportunities. Green hydrogen requires significant amounts of electricity from renewable projects. I hope that that is an indication from Mr Simpson that he and his party now believe that offshore wind is not a choice but a necessity as we seek to decarbonise transport in Scotland and, indeed, across the rest of Europe.

Bus Sector (Decarbonisation)

8. Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to boost the decarbonisation of bus networks while supporting domestic bus manufacturing. (S7O-00326)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I know that Mr Bouse is a passionate advocate in this area. He knows that, through phase 3 of the Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund, we have awarded £45 million to support the deployment of zero-emission buses and charging and refuelling infrastructure across Scotland. In particular, since 2020, Alexander Dennis has secured around 484 vehicle orders through ScotZEB and its predecessor schemes. I know that that is important to him. We have much more work to do, and we will continue in that regard.

Gary Bouse: Since 2020, the Scottish Government has supported the purchasing of many hundreds of electric buses through the Scottish ultra-low-emission bus and ScotZEB subsidy schemes. However, the constraints of section 17.1 of the United Kingdom's Subsidy Control Act 2022 have meant that some operators have sourced vehicles for municipal bus and private coach fleets from overseas. What further support will the Scottish Government provide domestic manufacturers such as ADL, which would enable Scotland's transport network to benefit from the generations of local engineering experience, reduce embedded carbon emissions and safeguard highly skilled jobs?

Stephen Flynn: Mr Bouse has struck on an important point about the fact that we need to operate within the terms of the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which prevents us from requiring operators to purchase buses from a specific manufacturer. However, as Mr Bouse has rightly highlighted, we have been able to invest in hundreds of buses across Scotland. We intend to do much more going forward. That is on top of the £30 million in research and development support that we were able to provide to Alexander Dennis—[*Interruption.*]

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Apparently, Reform UK members find it funny that we invest in zero-emission buses in Scotland. It is important to reiterate that the Subsidy Control Act 2022 is the responsibility of the UK Government. We will continue to engage constructively with the Government in that regard.

Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP): Rail freight produces around 76 per cent less carbon per tonne than road haulage. Given the existing rail capacity at the Grangemouth port, what can the Scottish Government do to establish regular freight services and reduce heavy goods vehicle traffic through surrounding residential communities?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Willie Rennie; my apologies—it should be Stephen Flynn.

Stephen Flynn: I thought for a second that the convener of the Transport Committee had received a promotion. He is welcome to take the hot seat any time that he likes, Deputy Presiding Officer. *[Laughter.]*

This is a serious point. We all want more freight to travel by rail. Over the summer, I was able to visit West Fraser, where £3 million-worth of investment has had a transformative impact and is getting HGVs off the road into rail. That has had a positive impact on surrounding areas and the transport network heading south. If we can do more of that across Scotland, that would be a good thing, and I am happy to work towards those aims with Mr Day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Mr Rennie to ask a question.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): The cabinet secretary will have to tread carefully with his answer because of live legal proceedings on ScotZEB 3. What confidence can he give the successful bidders who are committing £118 million on top of the £45 million from the Government that the Government's funding will be forthcoming, no matter what happens, so that they can go ahead and build the buses?

Stephen Flynn: Mr Rennie is right to say that I must tread carefully due to ongoing legal matters. I give him and other members the assurance that the Scottish Government's commitment to the decarbonisation of our bus fleet is real. We have delivered significant investment over many years. It is my hope and expectation that we will be able to continue with that good work.

Proposed Food Price Cap

4. Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported concerns from groups representing retail, farming and food manufacturing bodies calling for its proposed statutory food price cap policy to be withdrawn. (S7O-00322)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): I welcome engagement with the Government's proposal to improve the affordability of essential food items during a severe cost of living crisis. We are currently holding a public consultation that will inform our next steps.

We cannot ignore the fact that food prices have risen significantly in recent years and they continue to place pressure on household budgets, particularly for those on lower incomes. We believe that the Government has a responsibility to act where there is a clear public interest in doing so. As I said, we are gathering evidence and engaging with stakeholders across the food system to ensure that all views are carefully considered.

Duncan Massey: I wonder whether the minister has noted that former Scottish National Party minister Fergus Ewing has added his voice to the growing consensus that the scheme needs to be scrapped, calling the food price cap a “dud”, “madcap” and “possibly illegal”, and adding that the Scottish Government seems to have learned no lessons from past policy disasters such as the deposit return scheme. Will the Scottish Government now recognise those criticisms and cancel the scheme before real harm is done to consumers, retailers, manufacturers and farmers?

Tom Arthur: There is no scheme in place. We are consulting.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): In six years in this Parliament, I have seen some humdingers of SNP policies, but this one hums and dings more than any before. Is it not clear that the policy would have huge unintended consequences, including more pressure on producers and more farmers going to the wall, a big increase in the cost of non-essential items as the profit margin shifted from one product to another, and less Scottish produce and more cheap foreign imports on our shelves? Is it not time that the Government simply ditched this madcap triple whammy of damage that could be unleashed on Scotland's retailers and consumers?

Tom Arthur: I welcome the member's engagement on the issue. He obviously has strong views on the matter, and I am sure that he will take the opportunity to respond to the consultation and to engage in that process. I assure him that all responses will be considered.

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I will continue, as I did this morning, to engage with a range of stakeholders the length and breadth of the food system in Scotland. At the conclusion of the process of consultation and engagement, the Government and ministers will be in a position to determine what next steps, if any, should be taken. I thank the member for his sustained interest in the matter and I look forward to his continued thoughtful engagement on it.

A96 (Dualling)

5. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of its plans, including preparation of the business case and a timetable, to dual the A96. (S7O-00323)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): Both I and Mr Eagle are very familiar with the A96. He will know only too well about the commitment in our manifesto, and in the programme for government, to take forward the full dualling of the A96. Work is already under way in respect of the connection to Nairn and the Nairn bypass. If there are further updates to be provided to the Parliament, I will be more than happy to do that.

Tim Eagle: It is exciting, because we are just three years away from the original Scottish National Party promise to dual the A96 by 2030, yet, oddly, nothing has happened. The residents of Nairn, Keith and Elgin are, unsurprisingly, still waiting for a bypass. The 2029 construction start date for Nairn is not even guaranteed, yet 2,000 new houses and significant road works are about to cause further chaos.

I understand that the cabinet secretary is talking about budgets post the spending review. Can he confirm that he has secured the funding and that construction will start in Nairn—with no ifs and no buts—by 2029?

Stephen Flynn: I assure the member that I will always fight to ensure that the commitments that we have made to the people of Scotland will be delivered in line with the timeframes that we have set out.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know that the costs of current road upgrade programmes range from a low £20 million per mile to more than £30 million per mile for the most recently announced sections. That makes the roads some of the most expensive highways in Europe. Given that reforms to Transport Scotland have been announced, what specific measures will be taken so that we have cost-effective road upgrades? Will those measures be delivered in time for the A96 programme?

Stephen Flynn: I know that Mr Johnson has a keen interest in the matter, and we have had engagement in that respect. I assure him that Transport Scotland's officials and the Government are fully focused on ensuring that we deliver our projects in the quickest and most financially sustainable fashion. I am happy to continue to engage with Mr Johnson in that regard.

Large Commercial Retailers

6. Zen Ghani (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to support large commercial retailers, such as Silverburn shopping centre in the Cathcart and Pollok constituency, which contribute £414 million in economic activity annually and support 8,713 jobs. (S7O-00324)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government recognises the important role that retail, hospitality and leisure destinations such as Silverburn shopping centre play in Scotland's economy. They support thousands of jobs and bring significant investment to communities. We are supporting those businesses to invest and grow through a range of measures including non-domestic rates relief, which will save Scottish ratepayers more than £870 million in 2026-27. We are also reviewing the non-domestic rates system and consulting on planning reforms to support investment. Together, those actions will strengthen Scotland's retail, hospitality and leisure sectors and sustain the jobs and economic benefits that they provide.

Zen Ghani: Silverburn shopping centre not only provides jobs but also significantly contributes to the local economy. It recruits most of its workers from the local Pollok community. It operates as a real living wage employer and has actively reduced its carbon emissions by more than 44 per cent since 2019. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to promote those responsible business patterns in other large commercial retailers?

Tom Arthur: I recognise the points that the member raises about the responsibility that Silverburn is showing in its commitments around the real living wage and its approach to employing local residents. That is very welcome and it is something that we want to see more of. Silverburn is a major contributor to the economy in the area. I appreciate that this might be before the member's time, but people of my generation will remember it as the Pollok centre and have fond childhood memories of the rather impressive mechanical clock that was there.

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We are absolutely committed to working and engaging with the retail sector to promote and support it. It is often the sector that provides people's first jobs and, as such, it represents an important ladder in progressing through employment. Several actions are being taken through our retail strategy and the work of the industry leadership group. I stress to the member that I recognise Silverburn's importance to the local economy and the wider retail sector, and I would be happy to engage with him further on those matters.

CMAL (Procurement Processes)

7. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd will no longer publish the names or locations of shipyards bidding for the MV Lord of the Isles replacement contract or any future vessel tenders. (S7O-00325)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): Decisions about what information is published are a matter for CMAL as the procuring authority. In making those decisions, CMAL must balance openness and transparency with the need to protect commercially sensitive information and support a fair procurement process that ensures value for money for the Scottish taxpayer.

Paul Sweeney: The balance seems out of kilter to me. The new United Kingdom procurement policy note 025 explicitly instructs contracting authorities to treat shipbuilding as a national security priority and it empowers them to restrict procurements to domestic suppliers. However, just months after CMAL handed a major ferry contract for the northern isles to China, it is now hiding behind commercial confidentiality and has concealed the shortlist for that procurement after, in effect, excluding all UK shipyards from bidding.

Why is the Government allowing CMAL to use that sleekit legal loophole to keep the identities of state-subsidised foreign shipyards secret instead of using the new powers to protect Scottish industry? Will the cabinet secretary order CMAL to publish that shortlist today?

Stephen Flynn: I am not sure whether Mr Sweeney listened to my initial answer, so I will repeat it for him. We expect CMAL to balance openness and transparency with the need to protect commercially sensitive information and support a fair procurement process that ensures value for money for the Scottish taxpayer. That is what CMAL is doing, and that is what I expect it to continue to do.

Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that CMAL's approach to publishing information on bidders is intended to protect fair competition and secure the best possible value for island communities?

Stephen Flynn: Yes, I can. That question is a welcome antidote to Mr Sweeney's hyperbole.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Question 9, from Q Manivannan, was not lodged.

Borders Railway (Extension to Hawick and Carlisle)

10. Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what commitment it will give to extending the Borders railway beyond Tweedbank to Hawick and Carlisle. (S7O-00328)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): We are supporting the agreed Borderlands inclusive growth deal work to assess the case for extending the Borders railway to Carlisle. Through the deal, the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments have each committed up to £5 million to explore the opportunities and challenges of the proposal. Scottish Borders Council is leading the work on behalf of the Borderlands partnership, and the findings will inform future decisions on how the scheme should be progressed.

Duncan Dunlop: Bill McLaren famously said that a day out of Hawick is a day wasted. He would surely have championed extending the Borders railway to Hawick and beyond that to Carlisle, opening up the region to visitors, businesses and investment.

Back in the 2010s, it was the Liberal Democrats who delivered the reintroduction of the railway to the Borders. Although I welcome the feasibility study that is under way, campaigners have been kept waiting on the platform for too long and they are frustrated by the timescales for the three phases of the process. Can the cabinet secretary give a commitment to provide clear timeframes to get the project off the drawing board and on to the rails?

Stephen Flynn: This is not a Scottish Government project. It is being led by the local authority. I am pleased that the council has now appointed specialist transport consultants to take forward the strategic outline business case, and my understanding is that the work is expected to be completed within the next 18 months. I assure Mr Dunlop that my officials will be paying close attention to that work, as will I.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The feasibility study is already under way. I ask the cabinet secretary to come down to Hawick to meet the Campaign for Borders Rail. Aligning

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bus and rail transport is an important aspect of enabling people to get to work, but that responsibility is often shouldered by local authorities with very limited budgets. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how he will improve and integrate public transport in order to get more people off the roads and on to rail?

Stephen Flynn: That requires significant co-operation and partnership between commercial operators, but we are happy to take on any suggestions that Ms Hamilton has in that regard.

Ms Hamilton has invited me down to the Borders, and my office has been trying really hard to ensure that that visit happens. I am desperate to get to the Borders to have a meeting with Ms Hamilton and the campaigners. My understanding is that the latest proposal is for early December, and I hope that we can get that agreed.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): *[Inaudible.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Unfortunately, your microphone does not seem to be working, Mr Hoy. Will you try again?

Craig Hoy: It is working now. I thank the cabinet secretary for his positive response to my colleague Rachael Hamilton. He will be aware that I have invited him to visit Beattock to meet rail campaigners there. If he wants to do a double whammy that day, he could join us in Langholm, which is also in the feasibility study, so that we can discuss how it could benefit from an extension to the Borders railway. While he is visiting Dumfriesshire, perhaps I could also take him on a bus to show him why we need more buses.

Stephen Flynn: I thank Mr Hoy for his multiple, very kind invitations to come down to the Borders. I am more than happy to assess whether it is possible to include him in my diary in that regard. Otherwise, I am sure that he is more than welcome to join me and his colleague Ms Hamilton.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That brings us to the end of portfolio questions. I apologise to those members from whom I was unable to take questions.

Consent for Jackdaw and Rosebank

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01376, in the name of Liam Kerr, on consent for Jackdaw and Rosebank.

15:00

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The motion in my name presses the United Kingdom Government to stop prevaricating and grant consent to Jackdaw and Rosebank.

In order to quickly deal with the Scottish National Party and Labour amendments' slopey shouldering to the UK to avoid committing, I remind members of Mr Gethins' amended motion on 10 September, which both those parties voted for. It says:

"the Parliament ... recognises that energy policy is a largely reserved competence, but accepts that the Scottish Government should do what it can to provide leadership"

and the Parliament

"agrees to work together to accelerate energy deployment",

so I am delighted to give them that chance today.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): While we are reminding people of things, is it worth reminding the Conservative Party that it is because its Government made flawed decisions, which were found to be incompatible with the law in the Court of Session, that this is in doubt at all? Is it not prudent that we ensure that we get these decisions right? We are only in this position because the Conservative Government made dodgy decisions.

Liam Kerr: No, I do not accept that premise. What I do think is important is that Daniel Johnson clearly thinks that lessons should be learned. I hope that he has told his colleagues down south that they should be consenting immediately and without any of the delays that we have seen so far.

Speaking of the amendments, that of the Greens serves only to remind members just how out of touch and ill-informed they are. It also shows a somewhat sleekit use of polling, not least on the environmental case. Everyone knows that we need generation; the Climate Change Committee projects the UK electricity demand to more than double by 2050, and that has to come from somewhere.

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Will Liam Kerr take an intervention?

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Liam Kerr: I will in a second, Mr Langan.

Although intermittent renewables will and must form a key part of the supply, they cannot deal with the need for firm, dispatchable generation.

Jamie Langan: Will Liam Kerr give way?

Liam Kerr: In two seconds, Mr Langan. I am aware that you are there.

What is more, it is well known that the average emissions intensity of imported liquefied natural gas is around three times that of UK domestic gas production—even before the addition of emissions from liquefaction, shipping and regasification. Rejecting North Sea oil and gas does not make emissions disappear; it increases them. That reason alone means that members should not consider the Green amendment further.

Jamie Langan: Does Mr Kerr regret the Tory Government's record on oil and gas and its introduction of the energy profits levy?

Liam Kerr: Although this is a debate about Rosebank and Jackdaw, let us address the EPL issue. The EPL was brought in as a response to market conditions at the time and to Russia's invasion of Ukraine; it was at a level that the industry understood; it was made temporary; and it was brought in along with investment allowances. The SNP and Labour were huge cheerleaders for it at the time and wanted to hike it even further and to remove the investment allowances.

Another cheerleader for the EPL was Councillor Duncan Massey, who is sitting right in front of Mr Langan. At the time, Councillor Massey was entirely on message and a supporter of it; he wanted it.

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform) *rose—*

Liam Kerr: Perhaps Mr Langan might spend more time discussing such things with his colleague before opening him up to ridicule, which he is now desperate to come in on—I am afraid that I do not have time.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): We do have time for you to take the intervention—you just do not want to.

Liam Kerr: Oh. Well, in that case, I will take Mr Massey's intervention.

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): Clearly, the EPL continued to be in place well after I joined the Conservative Party, and I moved to Reform for the very reason of protesting against that tax, which has absolutely killed the industry.

Liam Kerr: I do not find anything on record showing that Mr Massey left the Conservative Party in protest at the EPL. What I can find is that his leaving the Conservative Party was awfully proximate to his failure to get on the candidates list when he applied for it. *[Interruption.]* I tried to protect the member from that revelation, but he was not having it.

The Liberal Democrat amendment is the very embodiment of that party's refusal to commit to anything and its determination to never actually upset anybody. However, it does recognise the energy security argument for UK production. The UK will continue to need oil and gas, and the more that we get locally, the more we control our energy supply; the less we are exposed to volatile international markets and geopolitical disruption; and the more we leverage our existing North Sea infrastructure and expertise.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Liam Kerr: I would really like to take your intervention, Mr Rennie, but I only have six minutes, and I am five and a half minutes in—

The Presiding Officer: Interventions are not counted against your time.

Liam Kerr: Well, in that case, I will take the intervention.

Willie Rennie: I am glad that the member recognises that we do not set out to offend people like the Conservative Party does. Nevertheless, he has struck on the right issue, which is that we need to deal with demand in this country. Of course, that should be the focus of every bit of Government. Does the member recognise that, so far, this Government has not made the progress on net zero that it should have in order to minimise the impact of those issues?

Liam Kerr: I very much do. I welcome the intervention, and I am glad that I took it, because Willie Rennie makes exactly my point, which, I have to say, is what the Greens have missed in their amendment—namely that demand is not going down and that we have to satisfy it. Frankly, after years of rhetoric, this SNP Government is not making the progress that we—as I think it recognises—need, and it is not committing to making that progress in the way that we need to see happen.

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I grounded my motion entirely in the economic benefits, such as the fact that, together, Rosebank and Jackdaw represent nearly £11 billion worth of investment, more than three quarters of which is expected to be spent in the UK. Actually, more than £1 billion has already been invested in Jackdaw by Shell. The platform has been installed, a 31km pipeline has been laid, and drilling of the four production wells was completed earlier this year. I mentioned investment. Approving these projects provides a signal to investors that the UK remains prepared to support major energy infrastructure, which is crucial for ongoing economic investment. Rosebank and Jackdaw will support more than 3,500 UK-based jobs at peak construction.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I look to the Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: It is up to the member whether to take the intervention.

Liam Kerr: I will take the intervention from Helen McDade.

Helen McDade: I just wonder, Mr Kerr, when you changed your mind from the Conservative position. Was it 10 years ago—[*Interruption.*—]or five years ago? [*Interruption.*] I have been talking to people like Murdo Fraser about this—

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Where were you? You were not here at the start of the debate.

Helen McDade: That is because it started early.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair.

Liam Kerr: That is an extraordinary intervention. The member might wish to look back, and she will see that my entire parliamentary career has been spent standing up for oil and gas, standing up for the north-east, and standing up for our brilliant oil and gas workers in the north-east and throughout the UK.

Almost 200 contracts have already been placed across the Rosebank and Jackdaw projects with supply chain companies, which offer—

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Liam Kerr: I will take the intervention in two seconds

The companies, which offer things such as engineering, fabrication, marine logistics, consultancy and specialist services, include 171 that are registered right here in the UK.

Heather Anderson: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Liam Kerr: Two minutes, please, Heather.

All that means that Rosebank and Jackdaw are expected to generate nearly £30 billion in gross value added over their producing lifetimes—including £9.1 billion through supply chain activity—and £1.4 billion in tax revenues by the end of the UK parliamentary term. That will rise to £3.8 billion by 2034. Crucially, consent for Jackdaw and Rosebank will help to sustain the Aberdeen and north-east ecosystem of companies, skilled workers, ports, vessels, fabrication yards and specialist expertise.

Heather Anderson: Does Liam Kerr acknowledge that the climate science is clear that there is a major issue in approving further drilling? Will he accept that the best way to support workers in the north-east is to support them to transition from the fossil fuel investigation of the past to the renewables of the future?

Liam Kerr: I am afraid that Heather Anderson is missing the point in exactly the same way as the Green Party. Simply saying that we will not drill in the UK means that we will have to import oil and gas from somewhere else in order to meet the demand. As Willie Rennie said in his very sensible intervention, we must reduce demand before we can realistically start talking about where we source oil and gas from. We must have a supply from somewhere, and the best place is the North Sea.

The case against providing consent for Jackdaw and Rosebank asks us to believe that refusing British production somehow removes the demand for oil and gas. It does not. It will leave us importing more, while we sacrifice investment, jobs, tax revenues and the industrial capability of the north-east on the altar of ill-informed and dogmatic virtue signalling.

The case for providing consent for those fields is straightforward: it would provide energy security while we transition, economic investment, and the protection of the skilled industrial base that will help to deliver Scotland's future energy economy. Consent must be provided for those fields.

I have no hesitation in moving motion S7M-01376,

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That the Parliament believes that consent should be granted for the Jackdaw gas field and the Rosebank oil and gas field, recognising the significant economic benefits that this would bring.

The Presiding Officer: That was a shift, with six interventions.

15:11

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): I welcome the debate that Liam Kerr has secured. I am sure that Reform members will be horrified and shocked that we are having a debate about a reserved issue—one that involves a reserved quasi-judicial decision, at that—but I very much hope that they manage to stay in the chamber until the end of it.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Will the minister take an intervention?

Stephen Gethins: My word—that was quick.

Mark Simpson: Given how much time was wasted last Wednesday on a reserved matter, we are more than happy to engage on something that is of huge significance to the north-east and the thousands and thousands of people who work in the oil and gas sector there.

Stephen Gethins: I would never accuse a member of being ill informed, but, if he was not here, how does he know?

It is not for me to get in the way of a family feud, so I pay tribute to Mr Kerr, because the sector that we are talking about is important to Scotland and touches on crucial issues relating to energy security and the climate emergency. I am glad that we have the opportunity to discuss those issues.

However, it is important to begin with some points of context. In fairness, other members have made some of these points. The global climate emergency is real and requires all countries to respond, including by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. The North Sea is now geologically mature as an oil and gas basin. On a more positive note, there is a huge economic opportunity for Scotland in the transition to renewables, which is also the path to long-term energy security.

That said, it is equally the case that the North Sea oil and gas sector continues to make a vital contribution to our energy system, our economy and our society. That is especially true in the north-east. Although our domestic demand for oil and gas products is declining as we decarbonise systems such as heating and transport, that demand will continue.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will ask a direct question. Is there not a huge economic opportunity in the development of Jackdaw and Rosebank? Surely there is, so will the minister come off the fence and state categorically that he and the Scottish Government are in favour of that economic development?

Stephen Gethins: Stephen Kerr has asked me to come off the fence, but I do not want to fall into the same trap that the UK Government did previously in a very expensive way, which is why we are having the debate today. To be fair, Mr Johnson has already pointed that out.

We can see a parallel-track approach to energy transition, in which North Sea oil and gas production is managed alongside the increasing deployment of renewables, but let me touch on that point and be clear about consenting for oil and gas fields, including Jackdaw and Rosebank. These are quasi-judicial matters that are reserved to the UK Government. Although I wish that that was not the case; Stephen Kerr likes that it is the case.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Gethins: No, I am going to make some progress.

I wish that that was not the case, but I must operate within the political system that I have, rather than the one that I would like to have. I welcome all converts to the case of independence, but we are not quite there yet. However, Mr Kerr is certainly doing his bit.

We continue to call on the UK Government to approach such decisions in a way that is rigorously evidenced and to do so case by case. That is the responsible thing to do. Ensuring statutory climate compatibility tests and energy security are key considerations. The process must be followed. Both fields were previously granted consent under the Conservative Administration, but that consent was then removed, which is why we are where we are today.

Let me move on to my own amendment, and a point of substance. The UK remains one of the only states on earth not to have established some kind of futures or sovereign wealth fund. Our neighbours in Norway,

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who discovered oil at the same time as Scotland, established one in the 1990s. It is now worth £1.5 trillion. Norway is not alone. Azerbaijan, where I worked in the late nineties and very early noughties, established a fund at that point. I remember that country then; it was not the country that it is today. It had just emerged from the Soviet Union. Even so, it established an intergenerational fund, which

“accumulates and preserves the nation’s oil and gas revenues for future generations.”

It was done elsewhere—in Tanzania, Colombia, Mexico, Angola, Gabon, Mauritania and Timor-Leste. It was even done at a sub-state level in Alaska, Alberta and Shetland. All those places established funds, but the UK did not. That is perhaps the defining failure of energy policy in the UK over the past half-century, and it makes the inevitable transition all the harder.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Gethins: If he can answer that point, I would love to hear it.

Liam Kerr: If the principle is that Scotland should convert a finite natural source of wealth into a permanent future financial asset, why was the £750 million from the ScotWind auction not put into such a fund?

Stephen Gethins: First, we have said that we will establish a ScotWind wealth fund during this parliamentary session, which was not done 50 years ago by Labour or Conservative Administrations, at our cost.

I want to touch on the amendment in my name, because there is still a point to be made on that. Even at this late stage, I call on the UK Government to do the right thing and get behind it. I hope that, given his intervention, Liam Kerr will get behind it, too.

During the past four years, the energy profits levy, which was introduced by the Conservatives, has generated £12 billion from North Sea oil and gas—dwarfing the ScotWind funds that Liam Kerr talked about. That policy is driving decline in the North Sea and, shamefully, it is being used to plug short-term spending gaps in the UK. That is grossly irresponsible and places a just energy transition at risk. We continue to call on the UK Government to replace the energy profits levy with a fair system that taxes excess profits but protects jobs, energy security and investment in our energy sector. I very much hope that we will see some progress on that in the budget in the autumn.

I conclude by restating the Government’s unwavering commitment to supporting Scotland’s valued and highly skilled oil and gas workforce during the transition. That workforce gives us a competitive advantage, and we will continue to do all that we can with the limited powers that are currently available to us to support them.

However, we have to start doing things differently. Although colleagues will focus on two individual decisions today, I urge them to look at what can be done, even at a late stage, to help with the transition.

I move amendment S7M-01376.5, to leave out from “believes” to end and insert:

“recognises that the UK Government will be making quasi-judicial decisions in relation to Jackdaw and Rosebank, and in doing so, will have to make assessments, in line with the updated statutory guidance issued following recent court cases, of the full climate impact of those proposals, while also taking due account of energy security considerations; believes that all applications must be fully assessed on a case by case basis within the appropriate legal framework; supports efforts to deliver a just transition and to take climate action to support the utilisation of clean energy to benefit the creation of jobs in the north east and protect the environment, and calls for the creation of a Future Generations Fund from all further income from oil and gas resources taken by the UK Treasury, dedicated to help grow Scotland’s renewables industry, support the communities who have generated hundreds of billions of pounds in taxation for the UK Government, and strengthen the supply chain to ensure ongoing investment and job creation in Scotland.”

15:19

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I am pleased that we have another opportunity to discuss our oil and gas industry. In particular, I hope that the Scottish Government will change its current policy and start backing new projects and new drilling, including at Jackdaw and Rosebank, which seem to have become the most famous oil and gas fields in the history of the entire North Sea.

On the other hand, I am less pleased by the Tory debate. The Tories kid on that they are great champions of the industry after giving it an absolute kicking while they were in government. They were the architects of net zero and, despite what Liam Kerr says, the vast majority of the parliamentary Tory party still are. They introduced the net zero laws that are used to block these much-needed projects, abolished maximum economic recovery as the long-standing national strategy for the industry and replaced an oil-focused regulator with a sinister transition authority. In addition, they introduced the EPL at 75 per cent, which Labour then increased to 78 per cent, further crushing the industry.

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I return to this place and the actual debate. This Government—

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way?

Duncan Massey: No. I am making my case.

This Government still seems to have a presumption against new oil and gas. It has not updated its energy policy yet. In the programme for government, it calls on the UK Government—

Stephen Gethins: On a point of fact, will the member give way?

Duncan Massey: Go on, then.

Stephen Gethins: I am seeking a bit of clarity. I will not sit here and defend, as he puts it, the “sinister” Conservatives or some of their policies. However, the policies on net zero are there to tackle climate change, regardless of whether we agree on the way in which they are being implemented. Does he agree that we should have net zero? Does he agree that we should be tackling climate change?

Duncan Massey: I do think that we should be tackling climate change, but there must be a global policy. Reducing emissions in the UK and Scotland has zero effect; it simply offshores emissions to China, India and the United States. Everyone in this place knows that.

I return to the programme for government. It calls on the UK Government

“to take an evidence-led and case-by-case approach to decisions on North Sea projects, with climate compatibility and energy security as primary considerations.”

The Scottish Government is sitting on the fence. It is pathetic.

The other day, I asked the cabinet secretary what more evidence the Government needs to change its policy and be more supportive. We all seem to acknowledge that the reality, under all scenarios, is that the UK and Scotland will need oil and gas for decades. In the UK, 75 per cent of primary energy still comes from oil and gas. Transport fuels, key chemicals and gases are vital for heating and industrial processes. Of course, the more renewables we add, the more flexible gas back-up we need for generation.

We know that we are still very dependent on oil and gas, that we are facing high prices due to disrupted supply and that emissions are lower for domestic production of oil and gas. Why can we just not acknowledge that and back our North Sea oil and gas industry, which is probably still our largest single employer, our largest taxpayer and our largest single source of project engineering capability? Why not just change the policy and acknowledge that?

The current backdrop could not be more worrying. We may be heading for the mother of all energy crunches this winter. Across Europe, we need more diesel, we need more aviation fuel and we need lots more natural gas. Geopolitics is the proximate cause of the crunch, but decades of delusional policy making have left Scotland, Britain, and all of Europe badly exposed to energy reality. We have less domestic production, we have closed refineries and plants across many sectors, and we have some of the highest energy prices in the world.

Given that backdrop, would it not be good if we could simply start up some ready-to-go new fields? Does anybody know some?

I call again for this Parliament to become a vocal champion of the North Sea oil and gas industry, and not be negative, as it has been in the past, and not to sit on the fence, as it is now. I call for Parliament to give clear, unambiguous support for Jackdaw and Rosebank, for new drilling and licences and, if necessary, for new UK laws.

I also call for clear support for activities that drive jobs, enable supply chains to continue investing and strengthen the North Sea, providing major tax revenues, a stronger balance of payments, greater energy security and the opportunity to reduce imports and costs.

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is winding up. He is over his time.

Duncan Massey: These policies are reserved, but support from this Parliament and from this Government really does matter. Please back our industry, and please back my amendment.

I move amendment S7M-01376.2, to insert at end:

“, and agrees that, for the long-term success of the industry, exploration drilling and licences should be resumed.”

15:24

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues, because they are serious, they are important, and indeed, they are urgent.

However, we need to decide what kind of debate we want to have. At times, Liam Kerr was trying to make the reasonable argument and balance the difficulties, but it does not help when he then lapses into slightly unnecessary and, dare I say, slightly hypocritical point scoring.

The reality is this: we are trying to balance four difficult, competing and at times conflicting principles in this debate. The first is the maturity of the UK continental shelf. Secondly, there is an imperative to decarbonise and electrify, not least because of climate change but also because of the maturity of the continental shelf. The third is our ongoing reliance on gas, whether we like it or not. The final point, and I am surprised that no one has brought this up, is the resilience and security of our energy supply.

At times, those things conflict over the short, medium or long term and need to be balanced, but anyone who claims that doing so is simple or binary is not telling the truth. We need to take a balanced approach and have a strategy, but that ultimately relies on making decisions that are robust and defensible, which the Conservatives would do well to think about.

If we look at the continental shelf, the simple reality that anyone who talks about turning on the taps must realise is that 80 to 90 per cent of our extractable resource is gone. To put it another way, we would need four to five times our current gas supply from the North Sea in order to meet domestic demand. We passed the point of self-sufficiency in 2004. However, that contrasts with the point that 2.1 million homes in Scotland are reliant on gas. We need to be very mindful that our heat pump roll-out is proceeding at a rate of just 7,300 a year. At that rate, it will take 280 years for every household to be able to electrify its heat.

I say to those who say that we should not develop the fields that it does matter where our gas comes from. I acknowledge the point that Liam Kerr made, because less than half of our current supplies can come from the UK. Seventy per cent of our imports come from Norway in order to make up that balance. However, the remaining third of our imports comes from other parts of the world, and their carbon footprint is threefold that of gas that comes from the North Sea. Therefore, if we want to reduce our carbon footprint in the short term—this is where the short term and the long term conflict with each other—it makes sense that we use our own supplies. We also need to be mindful of security, because there are those who seek to disrupt our supply.

If it was down to me, I would say yes, because I think that it makes sense to look at these fields, but it is not down to me. The decision that is taken must be robust and, as Mr Gethins pointed out, it is quasi-judicial.

Liam Kerr: I recognise Mr Johnson's contribution, but does he acknowledge that, as he said in the debate two weeks ago, it is very important that the chamber shows leadership on this issue? The North Sea transition task force has reported that 25,000 jobs have been lost in the industry since Labour was elected. Surely Daniel Johnson wants to signal in the strongest possible terms that we need to license Jackdaw and Rosebank. Will he?

Daniel Johnson: We need to reach a decision that can be relied on and that will not be challenged in the courts again, which is why we are here. That sums up the hypocrisy and the irony of this debate: although the Conservatives want to point to every other angle in the chamber, this would not be an issue if the decisions had been robust. The delay to approval would not have happened if the environmental impact assessment had taken account of scope 3 emissions and looked at the wider downstream carbon emissions of such extraction. The approvals would have stood if the decisions in 2022 and 2023 had been robust, but they were not, so perhaps the Conservatives should look at themselves.

I appreciate a short motion, and the Conservative motion is short, but if the Conservatives wanted a short motion, perhaps it should have said, "Sorry, we should have made a better decision." However, I tell you what: if we were going to have motions like that from the Conservatives, there would be little parliamentary business time to consider anything else.

I move amendment S7M-01376.3, to leave out after second "that" to end and insert:

"oil and gas production will remain part of Scotland's energy mix for decades to come and is vital to energy security and the economic security of working families and communities; notes that decisions on whether to grant consent for the Rosebank and Jackdaw developments will be taken at ministerial level by the UK Energy Secretary through a quasi-judicial process, with final consenting decisions resting with the North Sea Transition Authority; recognises the need for a wider programme of reindustrialisation, supporting jobs, domestic supply chains and investment in communities across Scotland, and believes that the transition to a lower-carbon economy must be a just transition that protects workers and communities while creating new industrial opportunities in the energy industries of the future."

15:29

Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I agree with the minister's point that, frankly, we are seeing a great deal of hypocrisy, given the debate that we had last week and the opposition that there was to speaking about our constitutional future. Had Mr Kerr's motion truly tried to deliver for workers in the oil and gas sector and called for concrete action that the Government can deliver, that would have been commendable. Instead, today's debate demonstrates, once again, that the Tories and Reform do not, in fact, care about the working people in the oil and gas sector and their families. They do not seek to deliver action that we can deliver here.

I take this opportunity to state the blindingly obvious. Tory and Reform members are intentionally misleading Scots to score political points when they say that more oil and gas will create long-lasting jobs, increase energy security or bring down bills. The reality is that, in just a decade, hundreds of new licences have been issued and new fields consented but the number of jobs that are supported by oil and gas has more than halved, from 441,000 to 214,000. Over their lifetime, the new fields are expected to produce a measly six months' worth of UK gas demand and two months' worth of oil—so much for job creation and energy security.

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Kristopher Leask: No, not today. The member can get his party's Facebook clips on someone else's time.

Russia's war in Ukraine has forced the UK to pay an estimated £183 billion in additional energy costs, which, according to the CCC, is £80 billion more than it would have been necessary to invest to enable the entire UK to reach net zero. Therefore, instead of having cheaper clean energy, folks are left with higher energy bills and more exposure and vulnerability to international price shocks.

The evidence could not be clearer: more oil and gas will not save jobs for the future, increase energy security or bring down bills. However, more oil and gas will line the pockets of corporation executives and their shareholders. BP's profits just increased exponentially, more than doubling year on year to reach over £4 billion. The worst part is that taxpayers contributed to those sky-high profits to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds. North Sea fields are now so uneconomical that the projects require tax breaks—and they have done for decades.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Kristopher Leask: No, I am going to continue.

In the case of Rosebank alone, we can expect a net tax loss of more than £250 million, while the field's owners, Equinor and Ithaca Energy, will earn £1.5 billion in profit.

The Scottish Greens will not support any of the other amendments today or the motion. Although we support the broad principles of the future generations fund that the minister calls for, determining licensing applications on a case-by-case basis is, as the minister knows, a point that we disagree on.

Likewise, although Daniel Johnson's amendment makes commendable points on the work that is needed to support a transition for workers, it fails to recognise that more dependency on oil and gas is not the same as greater energy security.

Equally, the Liberal Democrat amendment has much the same logic, although I welcome the Liberal Democrats' recognition of the need to electrify en masse and deliver greater energy efficiency.

Finally, Reform is still grappling with what a finite resource means, and its amendment calls for no actual action to help anyone, be it workers or families, or for lower energy bills, so nothing has changed there.

I encourage—perhaps in vain—members to support our amendment and get squarely behind our oil and gas workers' and supply chain's futures for the long term.

I move amendment S7M-01376.1, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"agrees that consent should not be granted for the Jackdaw and Rosebank oil and gas fields; believes that the exploitation of these fields would neither deliver secure energy jobs for oil and gas workers nor cheaper energy for consumers, but would instead facilitate profiteering by corporate executives and shareholders; highlights polling published earlier in 2026 indicating that almost two thirds of people in Scotland oppose new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea whilst 90% care about climate change; urges both the UK and Scottish governments to support renewable energy, particularly community- or publicly-owned projects, as the only pathway to provide economic security for workers and energy security for the nation, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the Just Transition Fund delivers genuine economic transformation and resilience for workers and communities."

15:32

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): We are, once again, talking about two fields that, although quite different propositions, have together become, to some, a kind of litmus test as to whether someone cares about the climate crisis. The issue of consent for the two fields has become emblematic in a way that is deeply unhelpful and does not do much to move us towards where we all know we need to get to: a society that has weaned itself off fossil fuels.

We also have to be honest that the debate today will do nothing to bring down bills overnight and, no matter how we vote today, it will not solve the climate crisis overnight either. I know that many of us in the chamber take the climate crisis very seriously. I do, and it is one of the main reasons why I am in politics. I have made changes in my life to reduce my dependence on fossil fuels, but I recognise that oil and gas still play a big part in my day to day life, from the way that the food I eat is produced and transported—

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way?

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie: I will.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the member for giving way so early in her speech and for the comments that she has made. I think that she will agree that there have been failures in energy policy. Our amendment seeks to send a message on where the funding should be—it should be used in establishing a futures fund. The UK is about the only country that has discovered oil and gas but has never established such a fund. Given the good sense that I know that she has, will she endorse that approach?

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie: In response, I only have to point to ScotWind and the points that were made earlier. For the record, I reject the idea that Scotland has not benefited from oil and gas in the past, and we would have concerns about—

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way? I think that she might have misunderstood my intervention.

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie: I will keep going.

I recognise that oil and gas still play a big part in my day-to-day life, from the way in which the food that I eat is produced and transported and the way in which the buildings that I work in are heated to the way in which the electricity that powers the laptop that I wrote this speech on was generated. The inconvenient truth is that, as a society, we still use too much oil and gas. The fact that we are still, in 2026—with everything that we know about the climate crisis and the causes of it—talking about whether to grant licences shows a failure on the part of successive Governments and society to bring down demand. It is as simple as that. The question must now be how we deal with current demand in the most responsible way while creating a credible and reliable pathway away from oil and gas that is fair to workers. That is the real and complex challenge that Scotland faces, which I think we all recognise in the Parliament.

The oil and gas industry has long been a totemic part of Scotland's economy, having provided employment, supported businesses and created a generation of highly skilled workers. There are communities that still rely heavily on the industry for their livelihoods. An effective and fair transition must be practical and rooted in the reality that communities in the north-east and other areas face. That means supporting workers and businesses through change and investing in skills and innovations.

While we ramp up the development of renewables projects, it is important that supply chains of skilled workers and infrastructure are maintained. Leaders in the renewables industry will point out that the success of future offshore wind developments relies on those supply chains being in place.

We know that the transition is not moving nearly fast enough, and we need to see more urgency on the part of the Scottish Government, particularly in rural industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, where advancements in new technologies are slow. As we know, rural communities are particularly—

Stephen Gethins: Will the member give way?

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie: No, I will make some progress—I am sorry.

Rural communities are paying for the ever-rising cost of fuel and continue to be disproportionately dependent on fossil fuels for heating and transport.

Given that we cannot simply wish away existing levels of demand right now, we have been clear that, if it makes more environmental sense to satisfy some of our current demand for gas ourselves rather than import it from far-flung countries with questionable practices—and we are talking about only a few per cent of our demand—then the UK Government should seriously consider doing so. If we can replace some of our imports that perform worst in carbon intensity, we should consider doing so. Equally, if—as I am being told—it is important for the future of our renewables capacity to maintain supply chains of skilled workers, logistics and

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infrastructure, that needs to be part of the conversation. However, if, as expected, the UK Government decides to grant consent for Jackdaw, that should be viewed as limited respite in the context of the transition away from fossil fuels.

We should all recognise that the real carbon cost is not in the production of oil and gas, because, fundamentally, it does not really matter where they are produced; the problem is that we are all still burning them. Therefore, reducing Scotland's reliance on oil and gas must remain central to our response to the climate crisis. That means accelerating the electrification of heating, transport and industry; promoting better energy efficiency in our homes and buildings; and scaling up renewable energy production across the country in a way that does not alienate the communities that host those projects. In that way, our energy demands can increasingly be met by renewable energy sources, oil and gas can stay in the ground, energy prices can come down and Scots whose livelihoods have depended on the energy sector for generations are not simply abandoned but are instead part of an effective and fair transition. Rather than more of these debates, people want their politicians to get round the table and get stuff done.

I move amendment S7M-01376.4, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"notes that the UK Government is due to make a determination on the Jackdaw gas field and the Rosebank oil and gas field; recognises that, in an ever-changing geopolitical climate, there is a real need to consider Scotland's energy security; believes that, in the case of the Jackdaw development, there could be arguments in favour of consent, including lower carbon intensity, improving UK energy security and economic benefits for those communities directly linked to the oil and gas sector that risk being left behind without a strong just transition; further believes, however, that any decision on consent should not delay the transition away from fossil fuels nor the work required to reduce demand for oil and gas; believes that there is a strong need for a greater electrification of heating, transport and industry, an improvement in energy efficiency in homes and an expansion of renewable energy in order to meet net zero objectives, and calls on both the Scottish and UK governments to work together to reduce emissions, drive down demand on fossil fuels and deliver a just transition."

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open part of the debate.

15:38

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I was not too sure whether the Conservatives were trying to play party politics or games today, but thankfully, when Liam Kerr spoke, he referred to the fact that the debate is on a reserved issue, which was not referenced in the motion that he moved. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, does the minister want to make an intervention? No? Okay.

The Presiding Officer: Please do not heckle speakers from a sedentary position, minister.

Stuart McMillan: Particularly when they are from the same side.

Thankfully, the Liberal Democrat and Labour amendments referenced the fact that it is a reserved issue.

Liam Kerr: Will the member give way?

Stuart McMillan: I have just started, Mr Kerr. I do not want to have round 2 after last week, so I will see what happens as I continue my speech.

Given that the debate is on a reserved matter, I was waiting for Reform members to stand up and walk out the chamber. Sadly, they are still here and their amendment has been moved. This debate highlights how pathetic their stunt last week was—

Duncan Massey: rose—

Stuart McMillan: If the member will apologise for last week, I will take his intervention.

Duncan Massey: The point that we are making is that the Parliament should be an unambiguous supporter of the oil and gas industry and put pressure on the UK Government to make the decision to give consent.

Stuart McMillan: That was not an apology for last week.

I turn to the motion and the amendments before us. The Scottish Government's amendment states that the UK Government will be making

"quasi-judicial decisions in relation to Jackdaw and Rosebank".

The minister touched on that, and the point is also raised in Daniel Johnson's amendment for Labour. The Government's amendment also states its belief that

"all applications must be fully assessed on a case by case basis within the appropriate legal framework",

which Daniel Johnson touched on earlier. In addition, it states that the Government

"supports efforts to deliver a just transition and to take climate action to support the utilisation of clean energy".

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I sincerely wish that we did not have to wait for the UK Government to take decisions about the industry in Scotland. I want Scotland to be a normal independent country, where we can decide energy policy to ensure that we reap the benefits of our extraordinary energy resources. No one can argue that the Norwegians, who have a sovereign wealth fund of \$2 trillion, have done a bad job in managing their energy affairs. I say to Stephen Kerr that that is in stark contrast to the daylight robbery that has happened in the North Sea since the 1970s, which has meant that the north-east and other parts of Scotland have not fully benefited from our natural resources.

It was not until 2007, when the SNP came to power, that the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which had been spoken about for many years, could be delivered. I have family who live up in the north-east, and we had spoken about it many times in the past. It was not until the SNP came to power in 2007 that the AWPR could be delivered, despite all the billions of pounds. *[Interruption.]*

I remind Stephen Kerr that £350 billion went to Westminster, and the money did not always come back to Scotland. For decades, Labour and the Tories have raided Scotland's energy revenues and treated our oil and gas industry as a cash cow where jobs are expendable. Scotland's oil and gas wealth has flowed south to fill the coffers of the UK Treasury, leaving Scotland with the economic scraps from Westminster's table. I will repeat that figure—the Treasury has taken more than £350 billion of Scotland's energy wealth for Westminster. Despite that, Scots are currently paying some of the highest energy bills in Europe. *[Interruption.]* Mr Kerr, why should my constituents in Inverclyde be worried about—

The Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair. It is not a two-way love-in, if you do not mind.

Stuart McMillan: It is certainly not a love-in with Mr Kerr.

In an energy-rich Scotland, why should my constituents in Inverclyde be worried about turning on the heating? It is a scandal that some people in Scotland are worried about putting on the heating because of Westminster's failure.

However, despite the fact that we have missed out on the full benefit of our oil and gas bonanza, with our vast low-cost renewable energy supply—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way on that point?

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: My goodness. I am in my last minute, and I intend to continue.

With our vast low-cost renewable energy supply, Scotland has a second chance to get it right. I am pleased that both the Tories and Reform are calling for the Parliament to state its case today. That might suggest that they are on a journey towards calling for independence; I do not know. I look forward to their contributing to future debates on all energy, social security and taxation powers coming to Scotland, and I particularly look forward to Reform contributing to future debates on rejoining the European Union.

The Tories and other unionist parties have squandered our first energy economy and our first energy opportunity. Let us not let them plunge more households into energy poverty as we move towards renewables.

I am conscious that I am over my five minutes, so I will end on that point.

15:43

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I thank my north-east colleague Liam Kerr for bringing such an important conversation to the chamber. It is a conversation that dominated the summer's news cycle, and a conversation that it is essential for us to have if we are to address Scotland's energy needs of today and outline the support that is required to build our industry of tomorrow.

I contend that nowhere was that conversation louder than in Aberdeen Central. My constituency is the principal hub of Scotland's oil and gas industry, and the local workforce that I represent has powered the UK for decades. Unfortunately, those workers have been let down by politicians of all parties who have allowed this conversation—

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Will the member give way?

Jack Middleton: I will give way to Mr Hoy shortly.

We have allowed this conversation to descend into a false choice between left and right, whereby being pro-North Sea somehow means that we are anti-renewables, with all room for nuance squeezed. All the while, it is Scottish workers who pay the price for wide-scale job losses.

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Craig Hoy: The member mentioned Aberdeen Central. If the SNP's credentials with regard to oil and gas are so in tune with those of the Scottish people and those who live in Aberdeenshire, why did it get absolutely trounced in the Aberdeen South by-election?

Jack Middleton: I am pleased that Mr Hoy has given me the opportunity to remind the chamber that I won in Aberdeen Central by 7,000 clear votes. Thank you very much, Mr Hoy.

I have been up front with my constituents, with whom I have an outstanding relationship, about where I stand on these very projects, and I am grateful for the opportunity to express those beliefs on the parliamentary record today.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful to the member for giving way. I am genuinely listening to him very carefully, and I hear his position on Jackdaw and Rosebank, but I note that, in August, senior SNP MSP Paul McLennan said that Jackdaw and Rosebank should categorically not be consented to. The member seems to disagree, so at decision time, will he do what he believes in, or will he do what he is told?

Jack Middleton: I urge Liam Kerr to have patience and let me make progress with my speech. I assure the chamber that I am big enough and ugly enough to have my own opinions on these things—and if the member gives me the chance, I will formulate them for the chamber.

I share my dismay that the institution with total and absolute decision-making powers on this—the UK Government—has delayed its judgment to suit its own narrow interests. Labour has made the political choice to leave our workers, our industry and our economy in the lurch, because it does not want the energy reality that we all face to be on the ballot paper in the Holborn and St Pancras by-election. Liam Kerr has previously described that decision as a disgrace, and I whole-heartedly agree.

However, I ask in good faith, if that delay is reprehensible, what should we make of the fact that the Conservative Government botched approval of these developments and set them back by years? Of course, the only reason we are having this conversation about Jackdaw and Rosebank in September 2026 is that the Tories, by cutting corners, left the projects legally vulnerable.

Mark Simpson: Will the member give way?

Jack Middleton: I am going to make progress.

I know that I have limited time, and I digress. From whatever angle we approach this conversation, the reality that we all face is that oil and gas meet 75 per cent of our energy needs. It is totally reasonable to argue that we will have to reduce that reliance, but our need for oil and gas in order to survive will not end next week or next year—or, indeed, next decade—and blocking Jackdaw and Rosebank will not end that need, either.

In fact, blocking Jackdaw's gas from flowing directly into our grid to heat more than a million homes this winter would place these islands in a perilous position. With gas supplies running low, the Strait of Hormuz blocked and in crisis, and blockages on the gas that we receive from Norway, we would be forced to double down on our ever-increasing reliance on fracked gas from Donald Trump's regime in America. That gas is liquefied and shipped halfway around the world at a rate of carbon intensity that is significantly higher than that of what we produce domestically.

Let me be clear: while we continue to need oil and gas, I will continue to support using Scotland's domestic resources over foreign imports. I believe that doing so will provide a much-needed vote of confidence in our workforce and our industry and, more important, it will create wealth for all of Scotland.

How we utilise that wealth, which is generated in Scotland and unlocked by a Scottish workforce harnessing Scottish resources, is deeply important. Mr McMillan touched on the fact that my corner of Scotland has sent more than 300 billion quid in taxes from the North Sea to the UK Treasury. Aberdeen residents like me, Liam Kerr and Mr Massey know that, in comparison with cities in energy-rich, independent nations—I am thinking of Stavanger—my hometown sadly has very little to show for it. Our wealth has been squandered.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I appreciate Mr Middleton taking my intervention, and I appreciate, too, his candour in respect of his position on oil and gas. How many of his colleagues share his view?

Jack Middleton: As I assured Liam Kerr earlier, I am big enough, ugly enough and, despite some commentary last week from former Government ministers, clever enough to formulate my own opinions and stand on my own two feet to convey them.

We know that these Scottish developments will create close to £1.5 billion in tax revenue by 2029 alone. That is wealth that is created in Scotland and which must stay in Scotland and be invested directly in

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Scotland's renewable industry to power our future. That has been my direct plea since giving Jackdaw and Rosebank my full and public support, and I am happy to see that reflected in Stephen Gethins's amendment.

Earlier this year, a YouGov poll found that almost two thirds of Scots agree that that money should be spent exclusively in Scotland. I hope that my parliamentary colleagues in the Conservative Party can join the majority of their constituents and back my calls on the matter. I am afraid that the Tories are increasingly looking to ape Reform's rhetoric in their calls for investment to be pulled from renewables projects, much to the dismay of the energy industry. Those calls are setting Scottish workers up to face a cliff edge, just like Labour has done. The Tories' anti-renewables rhetoric seems to stem from the top of the party in Westminster and it ignores the £150 billion of additional GVA that would be created for our economy by hitting net zero targets and scaling up the energy transition.

The question that we face at decision time is not a binary one about oil and gas or renewables: we need both, and that will continue to be the case for some time. We must accept that reality and work at pace to grow the industry of the future and to create Scottish jobs. That is why I support the amendment in Stephen Gethins's name.

15:50

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): As others have said, the motion is strangely silent on the fact that licensing is the responsibility of the UK Government and on the fact that a Tory UK Government lost in court for not adhering to net zero legislation. I notice that Liam Kerr did not mention that that legislation was about net zero; that may be because Kemi Badenoch does not allow the Tories to talk about net zero any more.

I will let Stephen Kerr intervene, if he agrees that we still need to work towards net zero.

Stephen Kerr: The Conservative Party's position is very clear: we believe in a balanced approach to meeting our energy needs. I will make a point to Alan Brown about his question on what is not in the motion. I have sat in the chamber for more than five years listening to SNP members regularly opine about all kinds of issues that have nothing to do with the direct remit of this Parliament. What is preventing Alan Brown and other members, following the example of the member for Aberdeen Central, from standing up and saying, "Let's get on with the development of oil and gas opportunities for the sake of the Scottish economy"?

Alan Brown: Stephen Kerr's intervention lasted longer than I have spoken for so far. I notice that he still did not mention net zero.

As others have said, licensing is a quasi-judicial process and needs to be treated as such. However—maybe Stephen Kerr will want to listen to this—I believe that, if climate compatibility tests can be met and if oil and gas imports from other countries can be reduced, there is a logic to considering important revenue implications in relation to the associated licensing. Clearly, job creation and job retention are good for the Scottish economy, given that there has been a decline in the North Sea over the past few years. If we take at face value the information that the company Adura put out, £3.8 billion in tax revenues is to be welcomed.

That reiterates what Scotland's North Sea sector provides for the UK Treasury and underlines that it is still not too late to create a wealth fund. Many in the chamber, including Liam Kerr, who went on about it earlier, get exercised about how the £700 million of ScotWind funds have been utilised. However, none of those members ever raises a peep about the lack of an oil and gas fund. They shrug their shoulders when we point to Norway's \$2.3 trillion sovereign wealth fund. The £700 million from ScotWind pales against the squandering of the North Sea's revenues by Westminster for decades. It shows that there has been a big lost opportunity, but it also shows that it is never too late. The £700 million from ScotWind is still a greater legacy than the UK Government has ever created.

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): Why did the Scottish Government not create a wealth fund with the money that it received from selling the seabed?

Alan Brown: That is ScotWind. I am sorry—the member will need to educate herself. That is the £700 million.

A future consideration has to be the ongoing development of the offshore energy sector and the development of our supply chain and manufacturing capability, which takes us to the need to reverse the decision on the possible £1.5 billion Ming Yang turbine manufacturing facility at Ardersier.

I will give way one more time.

Liam Kerr: On the point about a wealth fund, what is Mr Brown's answer to why the Scottish Government did not put the £750 million into a ScotWind fund and why it has instead spent around £80 million of it so far?

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Alan Brown: As a fellow member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, Liam Kerr knows the constraints of the Scottish fiscal framework and why the Scottish Government is having to manage that fund in the way that it is.

On legacy and our future direction, it is also critical that the pathways for the strategic spatial energy plan do not penalise Scotland's offshore sector. It is bad enough that the existing grid charging system impedes Scottish wind farm developments, without pathways possibly being chosen that do not provide future support for Scotland's offshore wind farms and grid connections.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP): There is a lot of misinformation in relation to ScotWind. Does Alan Brown recognise that it is about not only the windfall from the licensing of ScotWind but that, once the projects are up and running, there will be annual income from rental, which will lead to an ongoing legacy for generations to come, under Scotland's control?

Alan Brown: I thank Bob Doris for that intervention. I was going to mention that later. He is absolutely right. It is developing the projects to provide the revenues associated with power generation capacity that will create a proper wealth fund for future generations.

At present, when it comes to grid charging, we are told that it is only right that Scottish wind projects pay more money in grid charges than those in the rest of the UK, because that electricity has to be moved south. However, an explanation is never given as to why generators in the south of England are actually paid to connect to the grid.

National Energy System Operator figures show that an intermittent generator in north Scotland pays £28 per kilowatt while, in the Cotswolds, an intermittent generator gets paid £14 per kilowatt. How is that fair or logical, and how does it even adhere to the laws of physics? It is not as if the south of England grid does not require upgrades either. National Grid figures show that £17 billion of grid upgrades are planned for East Anglia, south England and London. How do the negative generation charges pay for that? When will we get a fair grid charging system that does not impede development in the north of Scotland?

There is also a chance for Scotland to be a world leader for floating offshore wind. We are world leading in marine energy, which is another opportunity that can be won or lost, depending on future UK Government support in the contracts for difference auctions. These are technologies that the UK Government could invest in directly as part of a just transition. How beneficial would it be to invest £18 billion directly into those technologies, rather than Sizewell C nuclear station?

We need to see a coherent and wider offshore energy strategy overall. Where are the calls for support for the Acorn carbon capture scheme? The plug was first pulled on Acorn by the UK Tory Government back in 2015. Eleven years on, and what was originally the most advanced cluster now lags behind north of England clusters, which can also access £22 billion of revenue that is allocated for carbon capture and storage. Why are there not louder voices across the chamber calling out the UK Government for its lack of support for Acorn? Why was Grangemouth not supported by the UK Government, when the UK Government can pay £1.3 million a day for British Steel? What effect has the Grangemouth closure had on energy security and transport fuel costs?

Careful consideration must be given to the licensing for Rosebank and Jackdaw and the associated climate compatibility tests and checks. However, much greater efforts have to be put into supporting Scotland's opportunities for clean offshore energies and creating that wealth fund for future generations.

15:58

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): We are in Scotland's climate week, which is a celebration of positive action that people are taking across Scotland to lower our climate emissions and to increase our resilience to climate impacts.

The Tories have clearly let that pass them by, just like they must have missed the report four weeks ago from that well-known virtue signaller, the United Nations Environment Programme, that said that the crucial 1.5° warming limit that was agreed in 2015—including by the then Conservative UK Government—will be breached in the next few years, because of the failure to reduce emissions.

The Tories have also somehow missed decades of scientific evidence that the burning of fossil fuels is climate vandalism. Indeed, as long ago as 1977, ExxonMobil's own research predicted, with terrifying accuracy, that continued burning of fossil fuels would produce dangerous global warming. It is almost as if they do not care. All that matters, it seems, is corporate profit. The oil and gas industry has been complicit in driving climate catastrophe and covering up the evidence.

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Today's motion wants to allow the industry to push us even further and ever faster towards total climate breakdown. We must change course—and fast.

A report that Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute released this summer makes for uncomfortable reading for the Scottish Government. We have not delivered the jobs transition plans that oil and gas workers in the north-east need or deserve. Simply talking about transition and funding different ad hoc projects does not amount to a plan or strategy. The institute is clear that the next five years will provide the Goldilocks window during which we must match the decline in fossil energy jobs with growth in renewables and other green economy activity to avoid a permanent skills and capabilities decline that would make the transition much harder.

If it is well planned and well spent, the just transition fund could be a game changer for the communities and workers in the north-east of Scotland and elsewhere that currently rely on oil and gas—it could genuinely drive demand reduction. However, the problem is that the fund is not being properly planned, and it is not even being spent. A list of projects is not a plan.

We need a proper strategy that draws together licensing, procurement, funding, supply-chain support, education and skills, and which not only drives down demand but enables the north-east to be the powerhouse of our new green economy. I have been asking the Scottish Government for that plan for years. A draft was consulted on nearly four years ago, but nothing has been published since; when I asked the First Minister about it in February this year, he had no answer. So, after a summer of devastating climate change-induced fires that have ravaged our country, I ask the minister where that plan is and hope that he will answer that question in his closing remarks.

As well as the fact that £500 million is nowhere near enough funding, we are spending what has been agreed for just transition far too slowly—only one fifth of that budget has been allocated so far, with Government allocations at just under £16 million per year from now until 2029-30. Let us be clear that those failures to plan and to invest are a gift to fossil fuel companies, which want to keep drilling, polluting and raking in the cash, and to their supporters in the chamber, who want to help them to drill, pollute and exploit even more. We must do better; otherwise, the disaster capitalists will keep dragging us towards climate chaos.

Communities and workers must be at the heart of our strategy for the future and empowered to own and control their own renewable energy generation and distribution. We must plan for genuine resilience against unpredictable global markets and price spikes that trap people in poverty. The fossil economy will never deliver that resilience; it belongs, as the Conservatives do, in the past.

16:02

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It feels as if every few weeks we stand in this chamber, trapped in an endless cycle of political short-termism and false binaries as we repeat the exact same arguments about Scotland's energy mix. I get the frustration, though. World energy markets are in turmoil, and families up and down the country are being squeezed to breaking point at the pumps and by utility bills. Meanwhile, the long, slow decline of the North Sea basin over the past 12 years poses colossal economic challenges to every tier of government—I saw it a decade ago when I was an account manager at Scottish Enterprise. Yet, time and again, the response in the Parliament is to scramble for quick fixes and short-term solutions instead of confronting the foundational truth of how we got here.

We are surveying the wreckage of 40 years of failure of the political economy in this country and 40 years of systemic economic vandalism, engineered by the Conservative Party, which left the proud university city of Aberdeen dependent on resource extraction, handed our strategic sovereign energy assets to foreign multinationals and ensured that an oil and gas boom that was built by Scottish entrepreneurial genius and state support was monetised and strip mined, with privatised profits taken overseas.

Let us remember our economic history. As I have said before, when Margaret Thatcher took power in 1979, the British state still had the power to shape the future of the North Sea and reap its benefits for the people of this country because of Labour Government policy. British Petroleum was majority publicly owned; the British National Oil Corporation, headquartered in Glasgow, was owned outright by the public; and British Gas held direct strategic assets beneath the bed of the North Sea, with a big national storage reserve.

Civil servants warned ministers, and world-leading economists advised ministers, to build a sovereign wealth fund. Likewise, from Parliament to the picket line, the labour movement said, "Take those revenues and deposit them in a national investment bank." The choice was staring us in the face then: on one side was long-term stewardship, state-led industrial strategy and honest recognition—to quote Labour's 1983 manifesto—that

"the oil won't last forever",

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and on the other side was ideological dogma, rapid privatisation and the squandering of our national wealth.

We know what choice the Conservatives made. The party that dared to lecture this nation on fiscal prudence became the party that, in the words of Harold Macmillan, sold off the family silver to bankroll tax cuts and engineer a short-term speculative bonanza in the North Sea.

Stephen Gethins: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Alan Brown: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Paul Sweeney: I have to give way to the minister.

Stephen Gethins: I thank Mr Sweeney for giving way. We have heard about ScotWind and producing a wealth fund from an infinite resource. Does he therefore agree that we should have a fund from a finite resource, which is something that Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher and so on failed to create? That fits with the member's argument beautifully.

Paul Sweeney: I absolutely support the creation of a wealth fund in that regard, and I would like to see it financed, but I am concerned by ScotWind being dependent on foreign direct investment. I am also concerned that only 30 per cent of the £29 billion supply chain is destined to come to Scotland. We need to concern ourselves with that.

The Conservative Party, which has dominated British politics for the past 40 years, took the greatest resource bounty in British history—a black gold wave that should have underwritten our schools, hospitals, infrastructure and industrial future for generations—and used it to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest and the welfare bill from the mass unemployment that it deliberately created through an inflationary surge in the pound and the Dutch disease that ensued. The Conservatives sacrificed our steel mills, our shipyards and our coalfields on the altar of free-market dogma, leaving permanent scars that continue to sear with pain across the working-class communities of this country. They could have protected the north-east, built a transition fund and safeguarded the workers in Aberdeen and across Aberdeenshire, but they did not care. They abandoned those workers, and that is precisely why the Scottish people rose up in 1997, including in the old Conservative heartlands, wiped the Conservative Party off the political map of this country and voted to build this Parliament.

Colleagues, it did not have to be this way. We need only look across the North Sea to Norway. In 1990, Norway made a different choice. It took its petroleum wealth, stood up a state oil company and built a sovereign wealth fund. That required fiscal discipline and vision, but today that fund stands at more than \$2.2 trillion. That is a permanent national legacy. The fund guarantees public services, funds state-of-the-art infrastructure and protects future generations for ever.

Alan Brown: Will the member give way?

Paul Sweeney: I am glad that Mr Brown is in such violent agreement with me, but I will not be giving way.

The Conservative Party robbed that future from the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom, so let us face that reality today. The North Sea is a mature basin that is in terminal decline. Fluctuations in world commodity prices might yield temporary blips, but the trend is clear. We cannot leave our country or the north-east region hostage to the whims of global market volatility, foreign-owned capital or resource depletion.

The economic ruin left to us by decades of Conservative failure will not be fixed overnight, but through a genuine state-driven green just transition, underwritten by public investment, strong trade union jobs and local supply-chain content, we can reindustrialise Scotland. We can ensure that the wealth created by Scotland's wind, wave and energy potential stays in the hands of the working people who build it and is not exported to foreign shareholders again and again.

However, we seem to be repeating the same mistakes, with our dependence on foreign firms, the selling off of key assets such as Wood Group and the failure to invest the ScotWind proceeds. As I mentioned, only 30 per cent of the supply chain is coming to Scotland, which is not good enough. I urge the Scottish Government to do better and support the amendment in the name of my friend, the member for Edinburgh Southern.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Mark Simpson. We have no time in hand.

16:08

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): I will briefly sum up. I will start with what Jack Middleton said, because I quite liked what he said. It is a shame that it took him five minutes to say that he supported oil and gas drilling, but it was good that we got there in the end. We know Mr Middleton's view quite clearly—he

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supports oil and gas drilling—but I suppose it would be quite useful for Scotland to know how many of Jack Middleton's colleagues share his view. There we go—silence.

I point out to the Greens that in a debate, it is disappointing that they do not wish to debate. I will just issue a quick reminder that Scotland accounts for 0.07 per cent of global emissions.

In the debate, it is important to zoom out a bit and take a look at the bigger picture to try to understand why we are in this sorry state in the North Sea. The answers come from the party on the benches behind me. During the Conservatives' years in power, they were the strongest advocates for net zero. Theresa May said that the UK should be "truly proud" of legislating for it. Boris Johnson came out and said that he was setting the

"most ambitious targets to cut emissions"

in the world.

We are very fortunate that Richard Tice, the then deputy leader of Reform UK, warned that net zero policy would drive up bills and said that Britain should become self-sufficient using its own oil and gas. I am delighted to say that, once again, the wisdom of Reform UK was proven to be correct. If Reform UK had not raised those concerns about the costs and impact of net zero and had not surged in the polls, I wonder whether the Conservatives would have ever changed course and abandoned net zero. I sincerely doubt that they would have done.

In September 2021, Kwasi Kwarteng was the energy secretary. He accepted that, as wholesale gas prices surged, suppliers would go bust. We ended up with 30 suppliers going bust, which affected 4 million customers and cost the taxpayers about £2.7 billion. After 11 years of Government, how had the Conservatives created a market so fragile that a wholesale price shock could wipe out numerous suppliers?

Lloyd Melville: Mark Simpson is putting the words of Kwasi Kwarteng into the *Official Report* and seems to be in support of them, from what I can glean. What other lessons does he take from the man who single-handedly crashed the UK economy four years ago?

Mark Simpson: I am quite confident in saying that I have never supported Kwasi Kwarteng.

Stephen Gethins: Malcolm Offord did.

Mark Simpson: I am not Malcolm Offord, for the avoidance of doubt. I will let Malcolm Offord speak for himself.

In April 2022, when Boris Johnson was Prime Minister, he admitted that Britain had

"drifted into dependence on foreign sources"

of energy because of

"policy fudges, decision-dodging and short-term thinking".

The record is damning: net zero targets, the imposition of the energy profits levy and an admission of failure and bad policy after the damage was done. Reform UK warned about that and has been proved right. Sadly, it was the public who paid the price for the Conservative failure.

Rachael Hamilton: Does Mark Simpson believe that it would be wise to register Reform's interests while he is speaking, particularly since Christopher Harborne is a major donor to Reform?

Mark Simpson: I am sorry—I am talking in a debate about oil and gas. Why would I be registering Christopher Harborne?

Rachael Hamilton: Well, that is my point—

Mark Simpson: So the answer is no.

I turn to the motion. Jackdaw is 150 miles east of Aberdeen. It is a gas field that is already installed and linked to existing infrastructure. Operators say that it could be connected to the UK network within months and, at peak, could provide more than 6 per cent of the UK's gas supply, which could heat around 1.4 million homes. Rosebank is Britain's largest untapped oil field. Together, they could account for 10 per cent of UK domestic gas production.

Opponents say that we should instead import gas. That is the same short-term thinking that Boris Johnson admitted to in 2022. We know that imported LNG is, on average, far more carbon intensive—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Mr Simpson, you have had your intervention time back. Unfortunately, we have very little time, so please draw your comments to a close.

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Mark Simpson: The Parliament should agree that consent should be granted for the Jackdaw gas field and the Rosebank oil and gas field, recognising the significant economic benefits that they would bring.

16:13

Stephen Gethins: I again thank Liam Kerr for securing the debate. I do not want him to get thrown out of his own party for references to net zero. Councillor Massey certainly would not get thrown out of the Conservative Party for some of his beliefs. It has been hard to be in the middle of what has been, for a great deal of the debate, a family dispute, but, sad as that is, there are even more serious issues that need to be tackled.

I am really glad that Reform members managed to make it all the way through a debate about a reserved issue without walking out; I congratulate them on that. It is quite the transition: not only are they now sitting through and contributing to debates on reserved issues but they now think that we should be influencing policy from China, as well. I am afraid that, just as I cannot influence a UK Government decision on the issue, I certainly cannot influence the decisions that are made in Beijing. That has been quite the jump.

On Labour's perspective, I thank Mr Johnson for a serious intervention, because the consent is a quasi-judicial decision. Mr Johnson was right to reflect on that situation, given the mess that the Conservatives have made in relation to the matter and the fact that that is what has brought us to this point today.

We will back Labour's amendment and our amendment, but I gently point out that the sole difference between the amendments is a commitment to the sovereign wealth fund—a future generations fund—that was endorsed by Mr Sweeney earlier. I congratulate Mr Sweeney on coming round to that, and I look forward to Labour voting for it, given that it said that it is something that it will back.

Paul Sweeney: It is important to note, as a point of procedure, that pre-emption applies, so that is not possible. However, we agree, in spirit, that we would support the idea.

Stephen Gethins: When it comes to a multibillion pound sovereign wealth fund, I am sure that the member can overcome his concerns around pre-emption, especially given that the energy profits levy has raised £12 billion in just four years—an amount that dwarfs what it is possible for ScotWind to produce.

On that point, let me turn to the Liberal Democrats. I find it astonishing that the Liberal Democrats want us to produce a sovereign wealth fund for an infinite resource—I agree with them on that—but not produce a sovereign wealth fund for a finite resource, when that has been established everywhere else in the world. Can Sanne Dijkstra-Downie explain her thinking behind that?

Willie Rennie *rose*—

Stephen Gethins: Maybe Willie Rennie can do some of the talking for her.

Liam McArthur: Behave yourself.

Willie Rennie: Yes, I think that that is inappropriate. Sanne Dijkstra-Downie is more than capable of speaking for herself.

Is this not just a bit of a distraction from the fact that the SNP has failed for years to set up a wealth fund, based on the resource that it has? Is the SNP not seeking to divert attention to a UK Government for a failure that—as it recognises—it has also made for a number of years? Surely the minister should focus on what his Government can do with the money that it has, given that it has failed to act on that so far.

Stephen Gethins: I will happily give way to Sanne Dijkstra-Downie on this point, if she wants to come in.
No?

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie: Please carry on.

Stephen Gethins: "Please carry on." Thank you very much.

On that point, this is a Conservative motion on the oil and gas industry. It is a Conservative failure on a futures generation fund, which simply was not set up under Labour and was not set up under a Conservative-Liberal Administration when they had the ability to do so. This Government has put such a fund for the infinite resource of renewables in the programme for government. That is not in the UK Government's programme for government, and it is entirely appropriate for us to make that case. I fail to see why the Liberal Democrats think that a fund should be set up for an infinite resource but not a finite resource.

Mr Leask accepts those broad principles, and I thank him for that.

Paul Sweeney: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

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Stephen Gethins: I should make some progress.

With regard to my colleagues, Stuart McMillan is right to say that this is a reserved issue, and the difference between independence and union is illustrated by the fact that £450 billion has been squandered, making the transition to renewables more difficult. That is a failure of half a century of Westminster energy policy.

Jack Middleton was right to highlight some of these issues. We are now waiting for the Holborn and St Pancras by-election before we even get a decision. Jack Middleton has been a champion for his city and this sector. Alan Brown was right to say that there has been no mention of net zero and to talk about the lack of support for the Acorn project and for Grangemouth.

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Gethins: No, I am reaching the end of my speech, and I do not want to get Mark Simpson into any more trouble than he is already in with his party. He talked about Reform's surge in the polls. It was such a surge that it came third. Talking about by-elections, it was such a surge that, in the by-election in Arbroath and Broughty Ferry in the north-east—the same place that he stood—the SNP's vote went up.

The lack of a wealth fund has been the most monumental failure of half a century of Westminster control over oil and gas. It makes the transition to renewables more difficult. I would not have thought that our amendment was terribly controversial. Lots of people agreed with it, and I therefore hope that they will back our amendment.

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