

## Progress with energy

The shortage of energy and the realisation of the need to keep the lights on has led to some crucial changes of U.K. policy recently.

The government does now see the need to keep the 3 oldest coal power stations open for when the wind does not blow. Let's hope they are in time to save them. yesterday wind only delivered 4% of our electricity, requiring huge quantities of gas.

It now sees the need to get more gas and oil out from the North Sea given the world shortage and the wish to avoid Russian energy.

Let us hope its fracking review comes up with the answer that we should offer incentives to landowners and local communities to allow onshore production as well.

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## Two Written Answers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

I have received the below two written answers from Ministers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (158851):

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish an assessment of the impact of high fertiliser prices on the volume of planting of wheat in England in 2022. (158851)

Tabled on: 25 April 2022

**Answer:**

**Jo Churchill:**

It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

The answer was submitted on 28 Apr 2022 at 12:07.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (158850):

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help secure more planting of greenhouse food crops in the context of high gas prices. (158850)

Tabled on: 25 April 2022

**Answer:**

**Victoria Prentis:**

An innovative, productive and competitive agricultural sector is one of the Government's key priorities, and we recognise the role greenhouse crop production has in ensuring a reliable and sustainable supply of fresh produce throughout the year.

The Government is working with the sector on a forward-thinking approach. It is looking at innovative ways of growing crops, such as increased use of greenhouse crop production and other state of the art farming technology which can help maximise crop growth and increase productivity.

We are aware of the challenges facing greenhouse growers and other farming sectors, as a result of the recent increase in the cost of a range of inputs including high gas prices, and the impact this is having on the production of food crops.

We continue to keep the market situation under review through UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group, which monitors UK agricultural markets including price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments. We are increasing our engagement with industry to supplement our analysis with real time intelligence.

The answer was submitted on 28 Apr 2022 at 11:33.

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## [Three written answers from the Department for Transport](#)

I have received the below written answers from the Department for Transport:

The Department for Transport has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (158848):

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the projected reduction in rail losses and rail subsidy is for the 2022-23 compared to 2021-22. (158848)

Tabled on: 22 April 2022

**Answer:**

**Wendy Morton:**

The Department's Main Estimate in 2022/23, for both support for rail passenger services and to deliver reforms, is £3bn. This is a reduction from an estimated outturn of c.£5bn in 2021/22, primarily due to an increase in revenue. Actual 2021/22 outturn will be published in due course as part of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.

The answer was submitted on 27 Apr 2022 at 14:32.

The Department for Transport has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (158852):

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the number of commuter miles that will be travelled on the railways in 2022-23 compared with pre-covid levels. (158852)

Tabled on: 25 April 2022

**Answer:**

**Wendy Morton:**

In line with our published guidance, the Department has developed a number of scenarios of possible rail demand to reflect uncertainty including how passengers respond post-Covid-19. The Department considers a wide range of evidence for our project appraisals and policy decisions.

The answer was submitted on 27 Apr 2022 at 14:34.

The Department for Transport has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (158853):

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an estimate of the expected cost to the (a) railway industry and (b) public purse of offering discounted tickets on certain railway journeys from 25 April to 27 May 2022. (158853)

Tabled on: 25 April 2022

**Answer:**

**Wendy Morton:**

Government has supported industry to develop and deliver the sale; the scheme is run on a commercial basis.

The answer was submitted on 27 Apr 2022 at 14:36.

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## No Windfall tax, Chancellor

The Chancellor has said a Windfall tax on domestic oil and gas is on the table. That is the low tax Chancellor. He says if the industry does not get on and invest he will think about it. He should know there is already a large windfall tax in place on UK oil and gas profits. They pay double corporation tax.

The Chancellor has a problem. Investment is lower than we would like. It is lower than many rival economies. It needs to be higher to help boost productivity, the key to rising living standards. There is an additional issue. UK policy in the EU was based on increasing our imports in industry, energy and agriculture leaving us with a large balance of payments deficit. We need plenty of inward investment to meet the bills in foreign currency for all those imports.

The Chancellor has decided to increase the UK corporation tax rate from next year. This is bound to deter more investment and put off some that might have otherwise have come. Ireland choosing a much lower corporation tax rate than ours greatly exceeds us in the amount of foreign investment it attracts, and collects more corporation tax revenue in relation to its GDP than we do. Treasury models and sages say this is impossible. In order to offset the negative effects of higher tax on investment the Chancellor offered super deductions against corporation tax this year to encourage an investment surge. It has helped but it has not been on anything like the scale needed. Many investors look through the super deduction to the higher rates to come and do not like what they see.

The Chancellor promised us he would spend the spring and summer studying what new types of offset or deduction he could offer to try to embed a more favourable tax regime for new investment into his corporation tax proposals from next year. We await those with interest. I can assure him the threat of a Windfall tax is not part of such a package.

The best way to attract more investment is to have low simple and stable rates. The more you change it and the more complex it is the more investors will decide to go elsewhere. Threatening investors who you want to make large long term commitments is a particularly bad idea. That is Labour policy, which I oppose.

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## The Lords and their amendments

This week when many of us would have liked more time to debate the cost of living response or to talk to people on doorsteps in the run up to the Council elections MPs have been detained late at Westminster each day to vote

down a large number of Lords Amendments to the Borders Bill and a couple of other pieces of legislation. I have no problem with our second chamber wishing to probe, criticise and propose improvements. That is their worthwhile and legitimate constitutional function. There is more to question when they persist in challenging the Commons on matters where there is public will, manifesto commitments and a clear statement of intent by the elected House.

Of course in a free society peers like anyone else are entitled to their views and can use their constitutional rights to the full. They also need to ask themselves if it is wise to constantly disagree with central policies they do not like when they have been put to electors and when they attract large majorities in the Commons. The bishops with a guaranteed 26 unelected seats in Parliament say they intend to oppose the government's policy to reduce people trafficking and illegal migration when the majority of the public and the majority in the Commons is urging the government on to do more to tackle these abuses and dangers. They highlight this issue when there are so many injustices and abuses worldwide at a time of war in eastern Europe, of starvation and civil war in some African states, and serious human rights abuses in a number of autocracies.

There is no likelihood of Lords reform on a grand scale. Tony Blair looked at it when he had a large majority and strong political support countrywide and decided it was too difficult given the likely opposition of the Lords themselves to reform. This present government would be wrong to divert energies to it when there was no Manifesto proposal and so many other matters more relevant to people's lives. Maybe it will be possible over time to evolve a better Lords. The current imbalance in membership means it heavily over represents an establishment view that does not favour an independent UK shaping her own policies, preferring a world of global treaties, so called independent bodies and the rule of the technocrats. It could do with a few more people who are entrepreneurial and freedom loving. Maybe it should move to single ten year terms for peers. Maybe retirement should be accelerated, allowing people to keep the title but lose the vote. The Lords is very large and only works because a good number of peers do not seek to engage day by day in its proceedings. It needs to show a bit more political balance or avoid looking like an establishment stitch up against the popular will.