

My intervention to the Minister at the Opposition Day debate on Non-commissioned Exempt Accommodation

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Has the Minister made sure that all future contracts are properly set up and policed at the beginning, so that the Government know what they are buying?

Eddie Hughes (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government): My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but we leave those decisions to councils that are commissioning locally. I guess it is up to us to try to ensure appropriate standards against which such accommodation is measured and then to give them the necessary powers to enforce that. Personally, I think that councils already have a considerable number of powers. I am not disagreeing with Opposition Members about what powers are required; I am just saying that I would like to see the existing powers used to the absolute max before we necessarily go reaching for others. If people feel they do not have the necessary powers, I would consider it not inappropriate for the Government to legislate, but we need to consider that carefully.

We are committed to finding the right approach to this issue, and we invested £5 million in a number of pilots in recent months to support the worst-affected areas, including Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Bristol and Hull. Through the injection of those funds, we have been working with local authorities to test approaches to improving the quality of this type of accommodation. We chose these specific areas partly because of the existing commitment to tackle these issues, and I pay tribute to the local authorities, which have worked collegiately and collaboratively with us during the pilots.

To take Bristol as an example, it has been conducting thorough assessments of new schemes and providers for some time. The council was able to use its funding to complete its work in summer last year. Meanwhile, Hull's supported accommodation review team was implemented in 2019, and the council has already shown a strong commitment to making the changes needed to solve the problems besetting exempt accommodation. Through the pilot, it was able to fund a large part of its programme and to take its approach to that programme one step further. As the House would expect, we know that the need stretches beyond these pilot areas and that local authorities in other parts of the country want to invest in tackling these problems, too.

The long road to net zero

Tomorrow I will give my lecture at All Souls College Oxford on net zero policies at 11 am.

If you would like to attend in person or by on line link please contact the College at <https://www.asc.ox.ac.uk/event/long-road-net-zero>

President Biden takes on President Putin

President Biden suffered a major reversal when he left Afghanistan with too much haste and secrecy, failing to inform or win over his allies to his chosen course of action. Afghanistan soon fell to the Taliban once US forces had gone, reversing the hard won gains of many years of strife and loss of life in a few days.

He has been more willing to consult NATO allies over Ukraine, and has warned Mr Putin of serious adverse consequences if he presses ahead with an invasion. The President and the US intelligence and military services have kept the whole world advised of Russian troop and weapon deployments near to Ukraine and have forecast early invasions. They seek to win the information war and to make it more difficult for Russia to seek to occupy Ukraine. President Biden did let slip the view that the retaliation would not be so tough were Mr Putin to make a limited incursion into Ukraine. Although his staff did their best to correct this and he himself changed his words, it looks as if Mr Putin decided the US President meant what he had let slip. So Russia has made a more limited incursion than a direct invasion with massed forces aiming at the capture of Kiev and the toppling of the Ukrainian government by force. The US has led a response based on targeted sanctions against individuals and certain banks, whilst stressing there would be much worse to come for Russia if she plans a bigger military attack.

The USA is still concerned about a further Russian attack using the large firepower Mr Putin has assembled. It is possible that Russia will foment the strife and tensions within the two provinces that she has now recognised as independent, seeking to drag Ukraine into a war in the east. It is also likely Russia will look at how to destabilise the government of Ukraine, adding political pressures to military challenges created in Donbas. What is clear is the Franco-German initiative to reach a diplomatic peace through creating two self governing provinces within Ukraine is now badly damaged by pre-emptive Russian action. What do you think the USA should do next?

Rebuilding our fleets as a maritime nation would bring more Brexit wins

During our time in the EEC/EU our merchant fleet and our fishing fleet suffered a bad decline. The ECJ striking down an Act of Parliament designed to promote our maritime activities did not help. The Common Fisheries Policy invited many more foreign fishing boats in to plunder our fishing grounds. The EU then imposed ever stricter quotas on U.K. fishing boats to reduce the impact of over fishing. A vicious circle was created denuding many of our great fishing ports of most of the trawlers that used to put to sea to fish our waters.

Rebuilding our fishing fleet should be an urgent priority. During the so called transition period we should be tougher on fishing by banning all the super trawlers of over 100 m in Length to help our fish stocks to rebuild. The government should work with private sector to put together boat finance, crew training and permits to fish to rebuild our lost fleet.

We should also reform the licensing, flagging and tax arrangements to make it more attractive for vessels to register in the U.K. Creating a larger flagged merchant fleet would stimulate more bunkering, victualling, repairs and refits in U.K. docks and yards. The MOD and other government buyers of vessels should usually buy from UK sources, to boost our shipbuilding capability. This could stimulate more private sector orders and construction. Some of our seaside towns need revival as they miss many of the maritime activities that used to be part of their commercial life.

My question to the Prime Minister following his announcement to remove the Coronavirus Act

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): It is great news that our freedoms are being restored, so will the Prime Minister now bring the same focus and Government innovation shown on this topic to vanquish the cost of living crisis so that more people have enough money to enjoy the freedoms?

Boris Johnson, Prime Minister: You bet!