

My Intervention on the Energy Bill

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

One of the barriers will be the shortage of grid and cable capacity to link into. Is the hon. Gentleman envisaging some kind of privileged access or some solution to the grid shortage?

Dr Whitehead (Shadow Minister for Climate and Net Zero):

That is not quite the subject of our debate, but the right hon. Member can see that we envisage an energetic and far-reaching proposal to develop the grid in such a way that those grid shortages are overcome, so that the grid is able to service the low carbon economy in the way we would all want it to do. In the context of what we are discussing, I remind the right hon. Member that this would be about distributed grids at a local level, rather than the national high-level grids. We need to take further action to strengthen and sort out grids at that level.

The Lords clearly continue to feel strongly about this issue; as we can see, they have sent back to us today a modified version of the original amendment, requiring the Government to consult on changes to assist community energy and, importantly, to set a timeline for proposals to be brought forward to remove barriers to the development of community energy.

Of course, there are others in this House who feel strongly about this issue. The proposals that the Lords have now twice tried to have inserted into the Bill are essentially the wording of a group called Power for the People, which suggested wording for a community energy enabling Bill for which it campaigned to secure signed-up support from parliamentarians. It did indeed secure substantial support from parliamentarians who feel strongly on the issue of community energy. Some 325 Members signed up in support, including 130 Conservative Members and, perhaps most remarkably, 22 members of the Government, including six Treasury Ministers, the present Chancellor and the Minister himself, as I often seek to remind him. There is no lack of support in the House for the principles and practice of community energy.

The Lords amendment seeks to acknowledge and further that support by putting forward very reasonable and, one might have thought, pretty non-contentious wording to add to the Bill. It is inexplicable to me that the Government should seek to resist these proposals in the way they have. Yes, they will say, as the Minister has said, that they have set up a community energy fund of £10 million over two years, which is welcome, and they have verbally indicated that, at some stage, there will be a consultation on barriers to supply, but there are no timelines for that and no commitment to move positively forward from it. That is what this amendment seeks to put right.

As I have said, the Minister appears already to be a signed-up supporter of community energy action, and I would fear for his own emotional wellbeing if he were forced today to perform another policy backflip and acquiesce in yet another Government repudiation of themselves in rejecting this latest Lords

amendment. Instead, let us end the extended passage of the Bill on a high note, and all around the House agree on both the importance of community energy and the measures we will need to take to ensure it thrives in the future.