

A new energy policy

The government is offering us a new energy policy. It wants a new long term plan for its aim of getting to net zero by 2050, and a shorter term plan for the current decade to keep the lights on and to provide affordable energy as we await the technologies and investments in a greener future.

The government is likely to back substantial increases in nuclear provision for after 2030. By 2030 nuclear output will be well down following the closure of most of the existing fleet of stations, with only one major new opening. It will need a big rate of build to turn this round for the 2030s. The government will also favour more wind generation. This can only work if at the same time the government and the market invest in storage and usage technologies that overcomes the intermittent nature of wind power. This week wind has been as low as 1% of our electricity generated, leaving us very reliant on gas and coal. Even if we had doubled current wind capacity it would have left us mainly dependent on fossil fuels to keep the lights on. Some combination of large scale battery storage, pump storage schemes, the production of green hydrogen and the location of energy using businesses close to wind arrays which can handle intermittency will all be needed if the country is to rely on more wind power. It is unlikely investment in batteries and hydrogen will be sufficiently advanced this decade to avoid the need for reliance on gas and other fossil fuels as transition fuels.

The short term plan is easier to work through. There is an overwhelming case to produce more of our own fossil fuels at home. It cuts carbon dioxide output substantially to do so. It generates a big windfall in tax receipts instead of sending huge sums in tax to foreign countries and in cash to companies who export to us. It generates jobs here at home. It cuts down transmission losses. The government needs to work closely with the domestic industry to grant the permits and tackle obstacles to the necessary investment in more output.

There can be more help to encourage people and businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, offices and factories. The public sector could undertake substantial investment in energy savings measures to cut its footprint.

If the country is to succeed with the electrical revolution the government wishes, it will take a new generation of affordable and attractive home heating and vehicle products to wean the public off their current reliance on gas to heat homes and petrol and diesel for their transport and deliveries.

Maiden Place Post Office Reopening

I have received the below letter from the Post Office regarding the good news that Maiden Place Post Office will be reopening on the 26th April:

Dear Customer,

Service Re-opening

Maiden Place Post Office

10 Maiden Lane Centre, Lower Earley, Reading, Berkshire, RG6 3HD

We are delighted to let you know that we will be restoring Post Office services to Maiden Place on Tuesday 26 April 2022 at 13:00. The branch closed temporarily in October 2021 following the resignation of the postmaster.

The new service will be operated from the same premises and will offer a range of Post Office products and services. Full details of the new service are provided at the end of this letter.

I know that the local community will join me in welcoming this good news and hope that you and our customers will continue to use this service. If you are a local representative, please feel free to share this information through your social media channels and with any local groups or organisations that you know within the community for example on noticeboards, local charities and in GP surgeries, to help our customers and your constituents understand what is happening to the Post Office in the local community. If you would like a supply of posters, please let us know.

Thank you for your support in restoring a Post Office service.

Yours faithfully,

Network Provision Lead

Two written answers from the Department of Health and Social Care

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (119388):

Question :To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of how many additional health professionals he needs to recruit to NHS England in 2022-23. (119388)

Tabled on: 07 February 2022

Answer:

Edward Argar:

The Department has made no specific estimate. In July 2021, the Department commissioned Health Education England to work with partners to review long term strategic trends for the health workforce and regulated professionals in the social care workforce. The Department has also recently commissioned NHS England to develop a workforce strategy which will set out its conclusions in due course.

The answer was submitted on 22 Mar 2022 at 11:16.

This is a strange reply. How can the NHS have put in a large demand for extra cash when it has no idea how many extra people it needs or wants? Wages and employment costs are its main item of spending.

How can it claim to have a serious working plan to get the waiting lists down if it is not recruiting a decent number of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals to carry out the operations and treatments needed?

What do the senior managers administrators do that prevents them from knowing how many staff they need? What signal does it send to medical schools and potential students that the near monopoly employer still does not have a plan to recruit more staff?

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (119392):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what forecast he has made for the likely increase in staff costs for 2022-23 for NHS England. (119392)

Tabled on: 07 February 2022

Answer:

Edward Argar:

A forecast has not yet been made. The Government is seeking pay recommendations from the independent Pay Review Bodies (PRBs) for most public sector workers not in multi-year pay and contract reform deals. Remit letters were issued to the PRBs in November 2021. As the PRBs are independent, the Government cannot pre-empt the recommendations, which we expect to receive in May 2022.

The answer was submitted on 22 Mar 2022 at 16:18.

This reply confirms that the NHS had not forecast the detailed spending needed to get waiting lists down when it was agreed to impose a tax and send that cash to the NHS. I find this surprising. Surely NHS managers need to know staff numbers and staff costs before submitting a bid for more money for waiting lists?

What estimate has the Environment Secretary made for the amount of land that will be taken out of agricultural production as a result of schemes and plans for wilding over the next two years?

This reply does not detail how much land the UK government will pay for to convert away from growing food. Given the enthusiasm for more domestic food and the supply difficulties in the global system we need to make sure we have the land available to expand UK food production. The UK does less than most overseas Agriculture departments to support domestic supply.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (141109):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the amount of land that will be taken out of agricultural production as a result of schemes and plans for wilding over the next two years. (141109)

Tabled on: 16 March 2022

Answer:

Victoria Prentis:

Wilding or re-wilding is the restoration of ecosystems to the point where they are more regulated by natural processes.

Although appropriate only in certain situations, this is something the Government is already supporting through projects such as peatland restoration funding or agri-environment schemes. Defra is also in the process of reviewing and developing an approach to rewilding that takes into account environmental and land use priorities. We will initiate ten Landscape Recovery projects between 2022 and 2024 that will, among other things, help restore wilder landscapes. The focus of these will be on large-scale sites where there are opportunities to significantly enhance the landscape to deliver a wide range of environmental outcomes.

Over the next two years it is expected that the amount of land moving from agriculture production into wilding projects will have no substantive impact on food production.

The answer was submitted on 24 Mar 2022 at 16:12.

President Biden's gaffes

When President Trump was in office the U.K. media and some on this site sought to argue that most of what he said was unacceptable. Now we have President Biden making a string of dangerous gaffes in a series of worrying international conflicts these critics of the USA go quiet.

President Biden's premature, sudden and ill judged withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan was unhelpful. President Trump wanted to get the troops home but made it conditional, leaving him unable to withdraw before the election as he wished. Joe Biden did not bother about conditions and did not understand he was giving the country to the Taliban after 20 years of fighting them. He failed to consult allies. Once he had done it he threw away all the lives and treasure spent on trying to build an Afghan democracy. He also let the Presidents of China, Russia, North Korea and others think the West was weak, allowing them scope to plan power grabs of their own.

Tested in Taiwan he then misspoke in too tough a way. He invented a military guarantee of Taiwan's independence which the US has never expressly granted. His staff rushed out a reiteration of the official policy of studied ambiguity. The US might go to war over Taiwan. The President accepted the correction.

Worse was to come over Ukraine. The President before Putin had crossed the borders with troops said his response would be more modest if any Russian incursion was limited. It seemed to give a green light to Russia grabbing more of the Donbas and may have egged Putin on with his military plans.

Now we have the President saying he wants regime change in Russia. Commentators and the public can wish that but if the President says it US resources have to be deployed to achieve it. His staff moved quickly to deny it is a US policy aim.

This is all unhelpful. Relations with countries like Russia, China and North Korea need consistent firmness from the leader of the free world. There must be no doubt what the rules are or where the red lines lie.