

Cutting wood miles? Let's make use of the government's enthusiasm for more trees.

I asked some questions to pursue the issue of increased UK timber production. I was aware of the government plans to promote the planting of many more trees as part of its climate change policies. The net zero carbon target now drives much of government policy. The interest in this within government is intensified by the long run up to the World Climate Change conference, COP 26 which the UK will host at Glasgow in November.

Whilst in general terms the answers show continuing commitment to more tree planting, they are short on detail. The pace of change is also slow. There is a big opportunity to expand woodland areas rapidly, and to encourage timber growth in sustainable woodlands. The owners can then harvest the timber and replace the trees on a defined growing cycle. The UK's warmer climate allows faster growth than Scandinavia and Canada where much of our timber currently comes from. The UK has substantial need of imported timber at the moment for construction, furniture and other purposes. We even import the wood to burn in the Drax power station. I will continue to press for faster action.

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to encourage the use of UK-produced timber to reduce wood miles. (142750)

Tabled on: 25 January 2021

Answer:

Rebecca Pow:

This spring we will publish a new England Tree Strategy, setting out plans to increase tree planting in line with our manifesto commitments, and to increase the management of existing woodlands. These actions will provide more domestic timber now and, in the future, reducing our reliance on imports. To drive sustainable investment into UK woodlands we also want to see the expansion and use of the Grown in Britain Certification mark throughout the supply chain, reducing the carbon footprint of the construction industry.

The answer was submitted on 02 Feb 2021 at 17:45.

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will work with Drax power station and UK forestry to source UK biomass to replace imports. (142751)

Tabled on: 25 January 2021

Answer:

Rebecca Pow:

Our woodlands provide habitats, capture carbon and provide sustainable sources of fibre and fuel. We are seeking to increase planting across the UK in this parliament, and to bring more woodlands into management. This will increase the domestic supply of wood for a range of markets.

We are also developing a Biomass Strategy for publication in 2022 and will issue a call for evidence shortly. As part of the strategy we will review the amount of sustainable biomass available in the UK, and how this could be best utilised across the economy to achieve net zero.

The answer was submitted on 02 Feb 2021 at 17:30.

[My speech during the debate on Exiting the European Union \(Value Added Tax\), 3 February 2021](#)

I have declared my business interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

As the Minister has told us, these are two important statutory instruments for the facilitation of trade generally and for the facilitation of trade within Northern Ireland and between GB and Northern Ireland, and to the extent that they make things easier and allow zero rating of important services and goods, I welcome them wholeheartedly. But, of course, as others have said in this debate, we meet today against the background of clear difficulties and problems in the implementation of the Northern Ireland protocol, where it appears that a number of important impediments to GB-Northern Ireland trade have been inserted, and it is crucial that the talks go well and we get rid of them as quickly as possible.

So when we look at the administration of VAT, which is an important part of the trade process, I would like an assurance from the Minister that these regulations, and all the other VAT and excise rules applying in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom, will be solely administered and enforced by United Kingdom authorities, because I have much more confidence in them.

Will he also assure me that the aim of these statutory instruments, and the wider VAT legislation that they add to and amend, is to ensure that the movement of goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, or the other way, will be as smooth and easy as the movement from London to Surrey or from Manchester to north Wales, because that is what I thought we had agreed and signed up to—that Northern Ireland was a fully integrated part of the United Kingdom single market, under our single market and taxation rules? I would like the reassurance through these statutory instruments that we are

intending for that to be true.

Will the Minister also confirm that there has for many years during our period in the European Union been an important VAT border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, but that it has always worked very smoothly and was not enforced at the physical border, in accordance with the spirit of agreements and not wanting barriers at the land border?

It was an electronic border and adjustments were made by computer or by correspondence so that these things could be sorted out in a sensible and decent manner without having to have people queuing at borders to make complex calculations and submissions.

If that is the case, does the Minister agree that it is in that spirit that we need to find the answer to the current impositions and difficulties affecting our trade across those borders? It seems very odd that we cannot replicate that success of our past trading, where electronic manifests, trusted trader schemes and so forth, and proper electronic VAT registration worked very well. Surely the UK authorities, if we are the proper and sole enforcement authority in Northern Ireland, can work with trusted traders, VAT-registered hauliers and ferry companies and so forth, and we can accept their certification or word that the goods on their load are entirely GB-Northern Ireland or Northern Ireland-GB. We can then accept, therefore, that there are no other considerations and the loads can then move as smoothly as from London to Guildford or Manchester to north Wales. It would be very helpful to hear the Minister's views on how that can be achieved and how quickly we can get to that point.

It is absolutely crucial to the people of Northern Ireland, as we have heard from their representatives, that they can trade smoothly with the rest of the United Kingdom. That was fundamental to the spirit of the agreements that the United Kingdom entered into with the European Union over the issue of trade with and between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I hope the Minister will have good news for us and that these things can be sorted out quickly.

[Trade frictions within the UK](#)

Yesterday in Parliament I raised the issues of trade friction between the GB and Northern Ireland again in the Commons. I will post my speech when it is available.

I was pleased that Michael Gove now accepts there are important issues to be sorted out and is engaged in talks with the EU, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Republic of Ireland. Maybe he can get an agreement to sort these matters. If not he will need to legislate urgently in the spirit of the EU's acceptance that Northern Ireland is fully part of the UK's single

market and customs area to ensure the smooth flow of trade between GB and Northern Ireland. Our border officials need to know that goods destined to flow between different parts of the UK should pass as easily as between London and Surrey when it comes to excise, VAT and goods checks. The idea that there would be lots of people seeking to evade goods checks into the Republic by routing things through Northern Ireland and claiming them to be UK domestic trade is wrong. Most of the trade we are talking about is large supermarkets supplying their stores in Northern Ireland, or deliveries by Trusted traders and large hauliers who wish to keep their privileged status and good record with the authorities.

I did not vote for the EU/UK Agreement because I had worries both about Northern Ireland and fish which I highlighted in the debate. These remain real issues and need urgent attention to tackle them.

[COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Update](#)

I have received this update today on the Covid-19 Vaccine Deployment programme nationally. In Wokingham, the programme is proceeding on schedule and constituents should wait to be contacted about when they will receive the vaccine.

Dear John,

We are writing to you to update you on the latest important developments on our deployment of COVID-19 vaccines.

We are delighted that by the end of 1 February, 9,646,715 people in the UK have been given their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccination. We have now vaccinated almost 9 in 10 over 80s.

We set the ambitious target of offering a vaccine to all eligible elderly care home residents and by the end of January we met that target. This is an incredibly important step in the fight against this terrible virus. Elderly care home residents were rightly prioritised because they are the most at risk and we have done everything we can to protect them.

There are a small number of care homes who have not been able to get vaccinated due to an outbreak, but all elderly care homes where it is clinically appropriate have now been offered the first dose of the vaccine.

This is the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history. It has been a huge national effort, bringing together the NHS family, primary care networks, hospitals and the tens of thousands of amazing volunteers.

Looking ahead, our vaccine supply and scheduled deliveries mean we are on track to offer vaccinations to all those in JCVI priority cohorts 1-4 by 15

February. While meeting this target is a challenge, we are on track to meet it.

The latest statistical release for England can be found at the link below, and we are committed to publishing more granular data, as soon as is feasibly possible.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/>

Despite this success we know our NHS continues to be under serious pressure. So, it is vital that we all continue to follow the rules: stay home, protect the NHS, save lives.

Yours ever,
MATT HANCOCK
NADHIM ZAHAWI

[The need to make and grow things at home – national resilience](#)

The UK fought two massive and bruising wars in the last century. On both occasions the UK state declared war on Germany without having the military resources in place to be able to defeat German armies on the continent. The story of each war was the same. Initial disasters for the expeditionary forces, skilled and brave but outnumbered, had to be followed by a massive scaling up of commitment. Vast citizens armies had to be recruited and trained. The UK had to rely on and build alliances to assist in victory. On both occasions getting the USA involved was particularly important. On both occasions the government had to transform our economy, turning much production over to a war footing, to make sure we could produce the guns, ships and planes needed to sustain major conflict from our own resources in our own factories, and growing enough food to avoid starvation. In each war the German strategy of trying to cut off our overseas trade by lethal submarine and surface raider attacks proved difficult to contain and threw us back on to more and more domestic self reliance.

The fact that we started each war with a professional military which could expand and change under the need to build a citizen army helped. We could also create, train and equip a much larger airforce, from scratch in 1914 and from a small one in 1939. The fertility and relatively clement climate for growing temperate foods also helped, with flower gardens and parks being tilled for vegetables. The excellence of UK technology, with leads in several fields for both wars also assisted. As we study those events today we should of course redouble our efforts to make sure we do not need to plunge into such vast conflict again. We should also learn the crucial lesson, that you cannot defend your country unless you have sufficient production capacity to

supply and replenish a war machine in wartime conditions. It is no good relying on imports, licensed technology controlled by others and basic foods from abroad if you need to win a serious war.

In 1914 and 1939 we had our own coking coal, steel furnaces, tank, gun and ship designs and chemical factories to make explosives. In 1939 we had some great private sector aircraft designs which could be built at speed and scale. Many factories making discretionary consumer items could be flipped to war production. Furniture factories could even make the wooden Mosquito plane to add additional numbers to the airforce capability. In a remarkable drive the UK reached output of 26,000 planes a year in 1943 and outproduced Germany in planes over the war as a whole, whilst the US ramped up from 2141 planes in 1939 to a massive 96,318 in 1944.

Today when planes and ships are more complex and expensive than in the 1940s we struggle to produce more than a handful. Procurement is very dependent on overseas supplies, and NATO action rests on interoperability and shared capacity with allies. The UK needs to have plans for how it would cope were one or more of our allies to fall into hostile or unfriendly hands, and have plans on how the UK would sustain herself in war conditions. That requires ensuring we have control of the main technologies which we could use for ourselves if needed, and control over sufficient production capacity with raw materials or access to them. It also means remembering it is good to be able to feed yourself to a sufficient standard as part of national resilience.

Having sufficient control over wider technologies, raw materials and skilled labour is also helpful in less stressful times, when the wars are fought with words and laws over trade issues with tariffs, export bans and the like. As the world trends towards more national self reliance, the UK should look more to herself in important areas so we can cope in adverse circumstances.