



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Backbench Business Committee

## Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 12 July 2022

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Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Chris Green; Jerome Mayhew; Nigel Mills.

Questions 1-13

### Representations

[I](#): Mr Richard Holden.

[II](#): Peter Aldous.

[III](#): Alun Cairns.

Written evidence from witnesses:

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**Mr Richard Holden** made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have three applications this afternoon. Dame Caroline Dinenage has asked for her application to be deferred until September. The first application is from Mr Richard Holden, who wants the House to consider the importance of agricultural and county shows to rural Britain. Richard, there was a glitch in your application: the supporting statement seems to be about schools, schoolchildren and coronavirus.

**Mr Holden:** I apologise, Chair. We filled in a new application but copied the old one, so I apologise for that. May I apply orally?

**Chair:** Yes, please.

**Mr Holden:** I have a number of shows in my constituency. They are incredibly popular and are the backbone of the area. The Durham miners' gala last week made me think of this as an issue. I have spoken to a lot of colleagues about it, especially those in the rural and semi-rural seats across the UK, from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As constituency MPs, we will all be attending the shows over the summer. We thought they would be something suitable to celebrate in Parliament because they play such a vital role in many communities.

The Royal Show no longer exists, of course, and given that so many of our small towns and villages will be having these events over the summer, perhaps September or just after party conference, on a Thursday, might be a good time for people to reflect on the importance of these events to their constituents, because they really are an integral part of life in rural Britain.

Q2 **Chair:** Do you want to namecheck any shows in your constituency?

**Mr Holden:** I would be delighted to. I started a few weeks ago with the Eastgate sheep show, which I was delighted to be at, where there were all the different breeds—particularly the Mules, which I think are a cross between Bluefaced Leicesters and Swaledales, up in the high Pennines. They are the prime sheep up there on my patch. That show starts in May.

Later in the year we go down Weardale. We start with the Weardale agricultural show in St John's Chapel and then we move to the Wolsingham show and finally to the Stanhope show in my constituency. They are all very different. Some of them are smaller and more agricultural and rural-based. I attended the St John's Chapel show last year, and about 2,000 local people will attend that one.

The Wolsingham show is almost a Durham county show, given its size—about 45,000 people went last year. It now has its own ground, which it has bought, and it is doing all sorts of events through the year. We had a big truckfest there recently, which was incredibly popular with everybody,



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unless you had to use the local roads on that day. There are really good events locally, particularly in some of the smaller villages. Up in Blanchland and Hunstanworth—which have only an annual parish meeting, not even a parish council—the show is the feature and focus for local communities, and it is a chance for them to get together.

Given that covid put a stop to shows over the past couple of years—this is the first time since I have been the MP that the Eastgate sheep show has been able to go ahead, even though I was elected in 2019—I thought it would be a particularly nice thing to do, given that such events are starting again.

**Chair:** Fantastic. That is all on the record, Richard, so it is good for the patch. Right, do colleagues have any questions, please?

Q3 **Bob Blackman:** I have one quick question. Would you rather promote the events in advance, or celebrate them in the autumn after they have happened?

**Mr Holden:** I would probably rather celebrate them after they have happened. They are annual events, so they are pretty well promoted locally. I shall be putting up billboards for the Wolsingham show outside my house in Wolsingham. If we announce that this will happen, it gives people the opportunity to promote their attendance at the debate further down the line and obviously the shows in their patches.

Q4 **Bob Blackman:** The reason I ask is that there is an opportunity on the last day before the recess.

**Mr Holden:** Oh, is there?

**Bob Blackman:** Yes, in Westminster Hall. You could have three hours if you wanted it.

**Chair:** It's a poser.

**Mr Holden:** Okay.

**Chair:** Consider that, Richard. Thank you very much.

**Mr Holden:** Thanks very much for your time.

**Peter Aldous** made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** Next up, we have Mr Peter Aldous in support of local food infrastructure. Peter, welcome. I apologise for beginning a little early—the reason is that a number of Divisions are expected after 4.30 pm.

**Peter Aldous:** That is fine. Basically, I am seeking a debate on local food infrastructure. I will start by making two declarations of interest. The first is a pecuniary one: I am a partner in a family farm in Suffolk. That probably motivates one of the reasons why I am proposing the debate. In my youth, a long time ago, the pigs on our farm were conceived, born or



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farrowed, reared and, dare I say it, slaughtered and processed, all in Suffolk. Today, that does not happen. The pigs may be born in places such as Hampshire, taken up to Suffolk to be reared and fattened, but then taken to be processed in places as far afield as Hull, West Bromwich and Malton. That is why I have an interest in trying to improve local food infrastructure.

Secondly, from the fishing perspective, I chair a recently formed community interest company called REAF, the Renaissance of the East Anglian Fisheries. We are focused not just on the catch sector, but on the whole industry from the net to the plate.

Why do we think that we should have this debate? First, I think that supply chains in the food industry are woefully weak and that, in some ways, that weakness shows itself through in the power of the processors. I mentioned the pig industry, and there are examples of the processors bullying farmers. It is a supply chain that does not work at the moment. If we can localise it, we can strengthen it.

There are also advantages in promoting and strengthening a local circular economy, to keep as much money as possible from that whole supply chain into a local economy. That makes the economy more resilient. It also creates local jobs. We would also be reducing food miles. We would be reducing the local carbon footprint. We would be getting away from the example I just illustrated of pigs being carted all over England.

Finally, we would be instilling pride in place. I am mindful that Lowestoft, which I represent, used to have the slogan "Fresh fish from Lowestoft." That is something a lot of people still remember. We would like that to be not just something remembered from the past, but something that we promote in the future.

How do we get there? How do we strengthen local food infrastructure? I think Government have a role as a catalyst in setting the right policy framework and providing some amount of seedcorn funding. I don't think you need all that much to do that. The LEPs and the local councils have a key role to play. From my experience, they are quite strong on food, so I think they have a role to play.

Skills are very important as well. Looking at Suffolk and Norfolk, we have two strong institutions—Otley in Suffolk and Easton in Norfolk. They have had their challenges in the recent past, but I sense that this will help strengthen those types of institutions, which you find right across the UK. I was about to say, "In the previous Government," but I shouldn't say previous, because I would need to count how long ago that might be. There was an initiative to roll out rural enterprise zones, which had some advantages. We may want to revisit that. Those are the sorts of issues we would look to highlight and elaborate on in a debate if you were able to grant one.

**Q6 Chair:** I take it that the answering Department would be DEFRA?

**Peter Aldous:** Yes, definitely.



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Q7 **Bob Blackman:** I have two quick questions. You are a bit light on Opposition names. You have a lot of Conservative party names. It would be helpful to have another couple of Opposition names. You have said either Westminster Hall or the Chamber. We have an opportunity on 21 July, the last day before recess, in Westminster Hall, which you would be welcome to take. Alternatively, it will be on the stocks for the autumn.

**Peter Aldous:** First of all, as far as Opposition Members are concerned, I suspect that with a few phone calls we should be able to sort that out.

Q8 **Chair:** Could you submit those names to the Clerk of the Committee, please? Would you be tempted by Westminster Hall?

**Peter Aldous:** Either Westminster Hall or the Chamber. I have no problem with Westminster Hall. I think from my perspective—how can I put this—there are some people at the moment beginning to see that last day as a being a bit of a graveyard slot. Don't take that as me being rude. My own preference is to grab any opportunity that you very kindly offer me.

**Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Alun Cairns** made representations.

Q9 **Chair:** Next up, and lastly, we have Alun Cairns on the United Kingdom's plans and preparations ahead of the 2022 FIFA World cup in Qatar.

**Alun Cairns:** You will be aware that two countries of the UK have qualified for the World cup. For the Welsh team, it is the first time since 1958.

**Chair:** Despicably knocking out Ukraine.

**Alun Cairns:** Exactly. I think the world was against us that night. In all seriousness, the World cup comes around every four years, and it is a great celebration and a fantastic opportunity to communicate the benefits and merits of sport and so on. But the World cup is in Qatar this year. There will be many fans wishing to travel who have legitimate concerns, including LGBTQ people. There will be reports about human rights. There is a lot of misinformation out there. There is some independent data from the International Labour Organization, sponsored by the UN. As we get closer to the World cup in November and December, there is an opportunity for Parliament to consider and debate the preparations that the UK has made, the influence the UK has brought about, and also the response we have received from the Qatari authorities.

I should declare an interest. I am chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Qatar, and I have travelled there. I have at first hand seen many of the changes, advances and improvements that have taken place, but I also recognise that challenges remain. Wherever you are in the UK and beyond, if you want to travel to Qatar, there is certainly a need for greater communication about the processes and practices that will be celebrated



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and how we can best support, advise and use the World cup as a force for good in terms of bringing about change in the region.

**Q10 Chair:** Under normal circumstances, if the World cup hadn't been in Qatar, you would want this in before the summer recess to advertise it, but since the World cup doesn't begin until 14 or 15 November—or around about that time—it is not time-sensitive from that perspective.

**Alun Cairns:** Not before recess. I would certainly encourage the Committee to consider the period before the conference recess.

**Q11 Chair:** So the three weeks between the summer and conference recesses?

**Alun Cairns:** Yes. The reason I highlight that period is because fans are wishing to plan and prepare, so the greater communication we can provide at the earliest stage, the better. We have been seeking various answers from the Qatari authorities at the moment, and it is clear that there is more detail to come. We can only presume that by the autumn that detail will be available. There are issues around accommodation. It is a small country. It has constructed lots of stadia. There will be the opportunity to visit three games in a day, for example, which no other country has been able to manage in the past. There will be transport issues, accommodation challenges and issues around how people acquire tickets. The earlier we have it in September, the better it would be for communicating that ahead of November.

**Chair:** They should learn a lesson from the magic weekend for rugby league at St James' Park in Newcastle, which had six games on in two days. Are there any questions?

**Q12 Bob Blackman:** Which Department would be answering?

**Alun Cairns:** The Foreign Office.

**Bob Blackman:** I think this might lend itself to a Tuesday morning debate, which would fit with 13 September.

**Alun Cairns:** Tuesday morning in the main Chamber?

**Q13 Chair:** No, Westminster Hall. We will have answering Departments for Tuesday morning in Westminster Hall. That was just a throw-away suggestion from our colleague.

**Alun Cairns:** It is the main Chamber I am seeking to have a debate in. I could easily have filled up the support from many more colleagues. A simple email request drew back these names immediately. I could no doubt encourage others. I would be confident that attendance in the debate itself in the main Chamber would be strong.

**Chair:** Okay. Thank you.