

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 2 June 2026

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Members present: Bob Blackman (Chair); Mary Glendon; Alison Hume; Will Stone; Martin Vickers.

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Adrian Ramsey, Dr Roz Savage and Rachael Maskell made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee, newly convened after the state opening of Parliament. This afternoon we will be considering 12 applications for debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall. Please keep your contributions brief and to the point, so we can make sure that everyone gets their opportunity.

The first application is from Adrian Ramsay, supported by colleagues, for a general debate in either the Chamber or Westminster Hall on the Joint Intelligence Committee's national security assessment on global diversity loss and ecosystem collapse. Adrian, please present your case.

Adrian Ramsay: Thank you. This is absolutely a cross-party application, as you can see today and from the 18 Members from many parties who have signed it. It relates to the Joint Intelligence Committee's national security assessment, which was published in January and highlights that ecosystem collapse is a threat to national security. It highlights that biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse are not solely environmental issues but have significant implications for food security, flooding, housing, public health, supply chains, critical infrastructure, economic resilience and global conflict. These are really major issues.

When the report came out, I raised it in business questions, and the Leader of the House acknowledged the importance of the report and said he expected the Department to bring forward a debate. I wrote to the Minister, who acknowledged the importance of the issues and said it was for the Leader of the House to allocate time for a debate. Many months on, a debate has not happened, and its importance has only increased.

Why has it increased? We have now had the Climate Change Committee's "A Well-Adapted UK" report, published a few weeks ago, which highlights that on the current pathway, we are set to see extreme changes in global temperatures by mid-century, which will make a big difference to the number of heat-related deaths, the number of homes that are severely overheating and so on. We also now have, as reported by *The Times*, the DEFRA Futures report, which says there is a realistic possibility that our food, water and natural ecosystems are at risk of "catastrophic failure" by 2030 to 2050.

I cannot think of any more important issues for Parliament to be grappling with than whether we have a reliable food supply, whether we have homes and buildings that are safe to occupy or whether our life-support systems will still be here in the next decade or more. The reality is that because these issues sit between Departments, they have not had the time for parliamentary debate and scrutiny. I think it is critical that, on a cross-party basis, we give proper airing to these issues.

Chair: Colleagues, do you wish to add anything?

Dr Savage: I will just make a short contribution. I think this is of enormous public interest. The national emergency briefing last November was attended by thousands of people. There is now a series of screenings

of excerpts from the national emergency briefing—I have three in my constituency in the space of two weeks—that are drawing in people who are really concerned about this.

A recurring theme in the national emergency briefing was the impact of climate change, particularly on our food systems and national security. We cannot look to our cousins across the channel to fill in the impact on our domestic food supply, because Europe is going to be hit even harder. It was very interesting hearing from General Richard Nugee about the military and strategic impacts of this. I am really seeing that this is an issue that has caught the imagination and maybe the fear of large sections of the public, and I think they would be very interested in seeing this debate take place.

Rachael Maskell: Nature is part of our critical infrastructure, and it is so important that we invest now, before we see such a scale of biodiversity loss—whether that is mitigating floods, giving us security in our water systems, giving us food security or building resilience for the future. The economic cost of getting this wrong will be the focus of this House if we do not press ahead, debate this and ensure there are proper systems of accountability in place for Government to answer to Parliament about the resilience that is needed now and in the future. Whether it is globally or nationally, this is such a critical and time-critical debate that we ask the Committee to consider holding it at the earliest possible opportunity.

Q2 **Martin Vickers:** Adrian, we have just heard from Rachael that you would like the debate to be held at the earliest possible opportunity. Do you want it nearer COP or in advance of COP?

Adrian Ramsay: Well in advance and at the earliest opportunity, because I do not think this is primarily about the international COP debates, as crucial as those are. This is about the action we are taking within the UK to make the UK as resilient and as prepared as possible. We are already seeing, for example, over 1,000 heat-related deaths each year. That is expected to rise tenfold or more in the coming decades, according to the Climate Change Committee. We can be taking action within the UK, regardless of what other countries are doing, to address these issues, but time is of the essence.

Q3 **Chair:** Before you came in, the Committee agreed to carry forward all those debates that are on the waiting list. There is a long waiting list of debates for the Chamber. I notice you have applied for both the Chamber and Westminster Hall. In the event that we offer you a debate in Westminster Hall, would you accept it on the basis that you would get that a lot quicker than you would for a Chamber debate?

Adrian Ramsay: I am looking at colleagues, but yes, my view is that it would be better to get it earlier rather than wait.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Dr Caroline Johnson made representations.

Q4 Chair: Caroline, you have made a request for a debate on solar farms on agricultural land. This is for a general debate in the Chamber. Please present your case.

Dr Johnson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee for considering this debate.

I would like a debate on solar panels on agricultural land. This is a huge issue across my constituency and, increasingly, across the whole country. I previously held a Backbench Business debate on 15 May 2025, which the Committee was very generous in granting me—thank you. That was for 90 minutes in the main Chamber, and it was a very well-attended debate, so although some Members bobbed for the entire debate, they could not get in, such was the demand for discussion of this vital topic.

Since the previous debate, international affairs have made food security more important than ever, as we have just heard. Lincolnshire is the breadbasket of England, producing 12% of the nation's food and 30% of the nation's vegetables, but is inundated with applications. Across the country, this is becoming more of a problem. Since the debate last year, there have been 13 further nationally significant infrastructure projects—NSIP-sized applications to Government—to build solar panels. The previous Government introduced measures that should have caused the Secretary of State to consider both cumulative impact and the use of best and most versatile agricultural land. The evidence appears to suggest that that is not being considered as well as I would hope, and that is a matter we need to debate.

On top of that, we have seen changes in the rules around electricity. What was considered a cheap form of electricity is probably not. Payments are made as solar comes in, then the electricity generated by solar is stored so it can be used when it is not sunny—when it is cold and the power is needed—before another payment is made, so it is not very cheap at all.

There are also issues of alternatives. Could solar be used on car parks? Could it be used on roofs? There are proposals for floating solar on reservoirs, for example. Those are all alternatives that could be considered that would not reduce food security. There are a lot of different topics.

The military also comes into this. RAF Marham has said that jets are not able to land near large solar farms, but the same has not been said for those landing in Lincolnshire. We do not understand why. That is another topic for debate.

Chair, you can see there are a wide range of issues relating to the use of solar farms on agricultural land that we could debate over a long period. Given the number of people who have signed the application—28—it would be a well-subscribed debate. That is as well as the fact that, last time you were kind enough to grant us an hour and a half, not all Members could use it, so we would use all three hours if we were lucky enough to be granted them. Thank you.

Q5 Mary Glendon: Chamber debates require the support of a minimum of



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seven Government Back Benchers; you have five. Do you think you could find another two to support your debate?

Dr Johnson: I hope so, yes.

Q6 **Chair:** The same thing applies as to the previous applicant: given the waiting list for the Chamber, and the fact that there is not necessarily a guarantee of time in the Chamber, if you were offered a Westminster Hall debate for this application, would you accept it?

Dr Johnson: I am just about to go into the Health Bill Committee, which will go until the middle of July. I would be happy to wait, as the next few Thursdays are taken up with that anyway. I wanted to come today because it is the first opportunity in the new Session.

Chair: Thank you very much. You do not have to come back to us with them, but if you could kindly supply the extra names to the Clerks, your application will be in order and we will contact you when your turn comes up.

Clive Efford and **Sir Julian Lewis** made representations.

Q7 **Chair:** This is an application for a debate in the Chamber on the infected blood compensation scheme.

Clive Efford: Good afternoon, Chair. I have some concise notes to comply with your request to be brief. Obviously, you will have seen that 30 Members from across the House have signed our application. Contaminated blood is the biggest scandal in the history of the national health service, as all Members are aware. The purpose of the debate is to provide Back Benchers with the opportunity to raise concerns about the Government's proposed changes to the infected blood compensation scheme before the next set of regulations are laid before Parliament, which may occur at any point before the summer recess.

Once the regulations are laid as secondary legislation, Parliament will not be able to amend them. It is therefore important that MPs have the opportunity to debate the proposals beforehand to represent the views of their constituents and enable Ministers to consider whether any further changes are required before the regulations are introduced. Given this timetable, an earlier debate in Westminster Hall would be preferable to a later debate in the House of Commons Chamber.

Sir Julian Lewis: By way of filling that out a little, in May 2025, in response to the infected blood community's concerns, Sir Brian Langstaff reconvened the infected blood inquiry for fresh hearings and made additional recommendations about the compensation scheme. The Government then consulted on changes to the scheme, and the community and advocates stressed that crucial changes had to be made if the compensation was to be fair.

Ministers set out their proposals on 14 April. There are some welcome changes, but there are also many points on which the community still has serious concerns. As we have heard, the Government will lay regulations



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to give effect to the changes before the summer recess, so time is particularly crucial here, as Parliament will not be able to amend those regulations once they have been laid. Thus, there is a limited window for MPs to scrutinise what is being proposed and to try to influence it around the points that we think still require remedial measures.

Q8 Alison Hume: We have a very long list of debates waiting for time in the Chamber. Would you consider a debate in Westminster Hall to guarantee that the debate happens before the summer recess?

Clive Efford: Yes. This is time crucial, as the regulations will be laid before the summer recess, so the sooner we have the debate the better. If that is in Westminster Hall, we would obviously accept that gratefully.

Q9 Chair: Do you have any intelligence on when the regulations will be formulated? The regulations will be set out, so even if they were not yet published, you could still have a debate on them. From our perspective, it would be helpful to see when the best time for the debate would be, to give it maximum influence.

Clive Efford: I was just checking with Joe, who is a facilitator from the Haemophilia Society, and he has no idea when, but they are expected just before the summer recess.

Sir Julian Lewis: The question is whether the Government have any idea when they are going to do it. They could do it and turn it around very quickly indeed, and then there would be no window of opportunity at all.

Chair: Thank you very much. The time criticality is noted, and the Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Rebecca Smith made representations.

Q10 Chair: This application is for a debate in the main Chamber on the 110th anniversary of the battle of the Somme. Over to you, Rebecca.

Rebecca Smith: Thank you very much. I am sure that most of you know the significance of the battle of the Somme. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and commemoration, I am here on behalf of everyone involved in that, and the 60 or so Members who have signed this debate application. I should probably admit that I used to work for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, so this matter is particularly dear to my heart, as I know it is for many Members. I know that many MPs from right across the House have recently visited sites in their constituencies and across the country.

Over my six years with the commission, the key thing I learned was how, as time progresses, using key anniversaries of battles, and the ends and beginnings of wars, is basically the only tool we have to capture the public's imagination. Given that the 110th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, which took place from July to November 1916, is such a big commemoration, it feels like an event we should mark in Parliament. Judging by the fact that 60 Members have signed the application, I am sure that many Members will want to share on this, whether they have



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family stories or stories from their constituents, or just wish to stand up to mark what was a devastating battle in which more than a million people lost their lives. This would make for a very good debate in the Commons.

- Q11 **Will Stone:** The battle of the Somme went on for quite a lengthy period, so do you have an idea of when you would want the debate to take place? Secondly, as you will have heard, we have a long list for the Chamber. I appreciate that this is an important debate to have, but would you consider a Westminster Hall debate if it meant you could have it on the exact date that you want it?

Rebecca Smith: I have been thinking about that. I actually think that a debate marking the end of the battle would be quite sensible, because it would land around Remembrance Day, in the middle of November. That would hopefully help with your scheduling but would also give the Members who have signed this application the best opportunity to speak. I am slightly concerned that if all 60 turned up in Westminster Hall, anybody who was not able to sign the application would not be there.

There is also a big date in September—should the September sitting work—because one of the big casualty days is around that point. I am not looking for it to be at the beginning of July, because I am actually not here for that week, but marking the end in November, around Remembrance Day, would be a really good opportunity instead. In terms of your Westminster Hall question, I do feel that the debate should be in the main Chamber, but I will defer to your judgment on that.

Chair: Thank you. The Clerks will be in touch in due course, and we have noted the timing range, which gives us some flexibility.

Catherine West made representations.

- Q12 **Chair:** Next up is Catherine West with an application for a debate on the safety of the Jewish community, in either the Chamber or Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday.

Catherine West: Thank you very much, Chair. There have been a series of worrying attacks on the Jewish community in our neighbourhoods and at synagogues, and increasing numbers of antisemitic incidents have been reported by the Community Security Trust. As the Member of Parliament for Hornsey and Friern Barnet, that is of great concern to me.

I am seeking, together with colleagues, to have a debate in Parliament to express the concerns of our constituents, particularly following the recent arson attack on the Hatzola ambulance service in Golders Green and the high-profile stabbing that followed, just before the local elections. We know that the Community Security Trust recorded 3,700 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2025, which is the second highest total ever reported to the CST in a single year and an increase of 4% from the 3,556 anti-Jewish hate incidents recorded by the CST in 2024.

The focus of the debate would be on policing and community cohesion, tackling online antisemitism, and education on the dangers of extremism. I have 24 Members supporting the application, including Labour,



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Conservative, Liberal Democrat and DUP Members. I would obviously prefer to have a debate in the main Chamber. Having listened to other applications, I see that that is rather a popular request, so I defer to your judgment on that.

- Q13 **Martin Vickers:** Catherine, as you are aware, if the debate falls on a Tuesday in Westminster Hall, we have to choose one for which the appropriate Department is responding. I presume you are looking for the Home Office.

Catherine West: Yes, please. I think the Home Office has more to say on this, and quite a lot of time has elapsed since this happened, so it would be a really good opportunity to hear about pulling together the different Departments. There is a lot going on, but I feel it would give the Government an opportunity to bring it all together. For example, the Chair will be aware that some of the campuses in the UK have issues, so there might be something that comes forward that the Home Office could talk about on that, bringing in some of the DFE programmes and so on. There is a lot going on, but this would allow us to really flesh out the Government's strategy on it.

- Q14 **Chair:** If you are going to accept a Westminster Hall debate, that is one thing, but from our perspective, your case would be strengthened if there was a divisible motion for the Chamber. We do not make these up on the hoof, but given, as you quite rightly say, the terrible things that have happened recently, you might want to consider what actions you would like to see happen. But it is your application; it is up to you.

Catherine West: I am very happy to seek guidance on precedents from the Clerks, and to discuss that with the Members who have supported the application.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Sam Rushworth made representations.

- Q15 **Chair:** The next application is from Sam Rushworth for a debate on Father's Day in either the Chamber or in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday or Thursday.

Sam Rushworth: Thank you very much for receiving me. This application has huge cross-party support, and 30 MPs have signed up. Fewer than half of those are Labour and there is about an equal number of Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. I think that is because this is one of those moments when we talk of fatherhood; there is a growing cross-party consensus that Government and policy have not caught up with the importance of male role models and fathers in people's lives. I am thinking here about the NEET crisis, the manosphere and the youth mental health crisis.

The evidence is clear: fathers report higher levels of purpose and life satisfaction than men without children, but also mothers with active caregiving partners enjoy lower levels of postpartum depression and higher labour force participation. For both the social and economic



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benefits, I think it is a good opportunity for Parliament to come together and—as we often do well—have a cross-party debate that I hope will push the policy agenda further forward.

We are seeking this debate in the week leading up to Father's Day, as it may also be an opportunity for Members to reflect on that important day that is 75 years strong in our national life. With that being the case, we would be quite happy for it to be a Westminster Hall debate, but preferably not on the day of the by-election.

Q16 Mary Glindon: You have talked about the importance of Government policy on this. Debate titles must directly engage Government responsibilities. Would you consider redrafting the title to something like, "The Contribution of Fathers and Positive Male Role Models to Families and Society"?

Sam Rushworth: I believe that we already have. The Table Office raised that point to make sure that there could be a Department responding. I think it suggested something like, "The Role of Fathers and Male Role Models". I am perfectly happy to do that.

Q17 Mary Glindon: It is not on the form here.

Sam Rushworth: My apologies. I think that we might have sent an older version.

Q18 Chair: The other issue is that if we are going to allocate this on a Tuesday, it has to be relevant to the answering Department. Which Department would you expect to answer this?

Sam Rushworth: I think we suggested Women and Equalities. I am also aware that the Deputy Prime Minister may be interested in responding on behalf of Government—it is an issue that I have discussed with him. I am not sure on the procedures there, Chair.

Q19 Chair: Basically, on a Tuesday we have to allocate the debates for the Departments that are answering that week. If you want the Deputy Prime Minister to answer it—which is obviously up to him—it would have to be a week when the Ministry of Justice is answering.

Sam Rushworth: If it has to be a Department, then let us say Women and Equalities.

Chair: If there are no other concerns, thank you Sam. The Clerks will be in touch in due course. Given the proximity to Father's Day, which is 21 June, we will see what is possible. They may be in touch with you very quickly if we can find the time to allocate.

Rebecca Paul and Joy Morrissey made representations.

Q20 Chair: The next application from Rebecca Paul and Joy Morrissey is for a debate on protecting the green belt and farmland from inappropriate development, to take place in the Chamber.

Rebecca Paul: Thank you for your time today. As you have said, we have put forward an application for a debate on protecting the green belt and farmland from inappropriate development. We think that it is particularly important at this time that we have a detailed debate, given the Government's ambition to build 1.5 million homes. That is obviously an important ambition in the light of the housing situation in this country, and we have seen it have an impact on housing targets across the board.

The ambition obviously has led to significant changes to the NPPF, which will have a significant impact on where we build. I think it is really important that we start to think about what it means and where the right places are for these homes. We need to be making sure that we have the right infrastructure and thinking about the use of farmland for food security. Solar farms, which have already been raised today, are obviously another potential issue. On top of all that are the environmental concerns. So there is quite a broad range of topics for us to talk about within the debate in order that we come up with a strategy and way forward that builds the homes we need, but in the right places.

Joy Morrissey: Let me give just a few facts. There are 218 Labour MPs who have green belt, and some of the top constituencies are Labour constituencies. For example, York Outer has 21,000 hectares, West Lancashire 23,000 hectares, Rother Valley 13,000 hectares and South Ribble 11,000 hectares. It is something that affects all the parties: Conservative, Labour, Lib Dem—everyone. That is why we have a lot of cross-party support. We are here talking about it, but when I had the HS2 debate, many Labour and Lib Dem Members came in and spoke. They were shy, but then they came out, because they wanted to voice their concerns for their constituents. This is something that can really affect all parties across the UK.

Q21 **Alison Hume:** Thank you for bringing this application to us. Is there a particular date that you would like the debate held on? Also, would you consider a debate in Westminster Hall rather than the Chamber?

Rebecca Paul: The good news is that we are very flexible about when to do it. We are also very comfortable about waiting. Our preference would be to do it in the Chamber. As you will see from the number of Members who support it, we made sure that we got seven Labour MPs to support it in order that we would qualify. But in a lot of ways, it is not a bad idea to have it later in the year. As we have heard, there are likely to be other debates that are a bit more niche, on parts of what I have just talked about—for example, solar farms or food security. So having the broader debate towards the end of the year could work quite well and allow us to pull everything together.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Andy MacNae and Kim Leadbeater made representations.

Q22 **Chair:** This application is from Andy MacNae and Kim Leadbeater. It is for



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a debate on the impact of physical recreation on health and wellbeing and, once again, for a debate in the main Chamber. Who's kicking off?

Andy MacNae: Physical activity and wellbeing, through the lens of prevention. We know that physical activity has massive positive impacts on mental and physical health. One of the three pivots in the NHS 10-year plan is towards prevention. We have talked about the importance of prevention within things like Pathways to Work and all these sorts of areas recently. It is a massive area, yet there is a huge policy gap in terms of turning that recognition of the importance and the potential of physical activity to prevent into actual policy. Part of the reason for that is that it goes across so many different Departments. It is a cross-governmental and cross-party issue, and one that is of great importance to a lot of Members. We have 50 signatories. We could have got a lot more had we given it a bit more time. There is huge interest in this, and I think it really does need a Backbench debate to bring the whole issue together in a way that simply would not happen otherwise. So I think it will be hugely valuable.

Kim Leadbeater: I am really pleased to support the debate that Andy has put forward. Before I came to this place, I spent 20 years working in the sport and health and fitness industry, and I used to say to my students, because I was a lecturer in those subjects, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a Government who really understood the importance of sport, physical activity and movement for our holistic health and wellbeing?" I spent three years as an Opposition MP banging that drum and trying to get the previous Government to take a cross-departmental approach to this agenda. Now that we have a Labour Government, I am banging the same drum. I am pleased that, as Andy has said, we are doing more on the prevention and early intervention agenda, but I think there is a lot more to be done.

I have spent a lot of time in the five years I have been here chairing and being involved with different all-party parliamentary groups, including on sport, tennis, running, and loneliness and connected communities. We need a holistic, cross-party push to get the Government to do more on this agenda. We have support from the chief medical officer, who said: "If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat."

It is a real opportunity for colleagues from across the House to keep the health and wellbeing agenda at the heart of the Government's focus, despite many other things going on at the moment. I would love it if we could have this debate as soon as possible.

Q23 **Will Stone:** As you have heard already, there is a long waiting list for the Chamber. Would you consider a Westminster Hall debate or are you happy to wait?

Andy MacNae: Given the breadth of support for the debate and the fact that it sits across many agendas, it would suit a Chamber debate. I think that would be appropriate. As Kim said, we would like it as soon as

possible but, at the same time, we are building a set of actions around when we might get a debate, so there is some flexibility there. If we went past the summer recess, we could work around that, for instance. For me, it really does work as a Chamber debate.

Kim Leadbeater: I agree. I said “as soon as possible” because I am quite impatient, but I would rather give colleagues the opportunity to speak on this. As Andy has alluded to, there is a huge amount of interest because of the cross-cutting nature of the subject and the number of Departments it would be great to hear from on that range of issues. I think a Chamber debate would be brilliant, but I appreciate how busy you guys are.

Chair: Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Richard Quigley made representations.

Q24 **Chair:** This application is for a debate on isolation and deprivation in coastal communities in Westminster Hall on a Tuesday morning.

Richard Quigley: I would take a car park to do the debate in, if it is available! The debate is about isolation and deprivation in coastal communities. I will present the argument from the eyes of the Isle of Wight, the point being that the many coastal communities represented will suffer similar issues.

The Isle of Wight has the second highest level of educational deprivation in the south of England, reflecting persistent challenges in attainment, access to opportunity and skills development. GCSE performance places the island at or near the bottom of national rankings, underlining deep-rooted inequalities in educational outcomes. Almost 24% of children live in absolute poverty on the island, which is 4% higher than the national average, and 13% of households are in fuel poverty, which is about 1.5 percentage points above the national average. The earnings gap between the national average and the average on the Isle of Wight is at least £5,500 a year.

I wanted the opportunity for the coastal communities to raise the flag and say, “Look, we need some help.”

Q25 **Martin Vickers:** There would be a lot more flexibility if we could offer you a Thursday afternoon. On Tuesdays, as you know, there is a rota for which Department speaks.

Richard Quigley: Thursday afternoon is fine as well.

Q26 **Chair:** Would the Treasury be the answering Department?

Richard Quigley: Ideally, it would be the Treasury, but it could also be MHCLG. It depends which level of disappointment you want.

Chair: Getting the Treasury to respond to any such debate is always a challenge. Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch in due course.

Bradley Thomas made representations.



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Q27 **Chair:** This application is for a debate on increased protection for green-belt land in the Chamber.

Bradley Thomas: I will not go through all the arguments around the green belt because you have heard most of them this afternoon, but I will emphasise that green-belt land covers 1.63 million hectares of land across the country—about 12.5% of land area. One of the most profound implications of policies brought in by the Government has been the increasing proposals for development on the green belt. To put that into context, my constituency is 89% green belt, but we have seen an 85% uplift in our housing target. We know that is taking place across the country. More broadly, Members across the House have concerns around the long-term protection of the green belt for various different reasons, which I will not go into.

I would like to stress that since July 2024, there have been 452 contributions in the House on the importance of the green belt. Despite this, there have been no Backbench Business debates on green belt or housing targets specifically, according to research that I did, between the 2024 and 2026 Session. While there have been seven debates since July 2024 broadly talking about the green belt, this is intended to be a debate specifically on long-term protection of the green belt.

Q28 **Mary Glendon:** Given what you said about the green belt, there is quite a lot of overlap between your application and that of Rebecca Paul and Joy Morrissey, including some of the signatories. Would you consider merging your application with theirs, to be higher up on the waiting list?

Bradley Thomas: As long as a merger and the scope of the title of such a debate enables me to capture the points I want to make, and I am allowed sufficient prominence to speak in it, I am happy to do that.

Q29 **Chair:** Just so you are aware, depending on whether it is Westminster Hall or the Chamber, the gift of who speaks is up to the Speaker or whoever is chairing Westminster Hall. We can give advice, but we cannot control who is chosen to speak.

Bradley Thomas: Sure. Subject to that caveat, I would rather maintain a specific debate on this. I am happy to wait for as long as that takes and would prefer to go for the main Chamber.

Q30 **Will Stone:** I just have a quick point: their debate has the required amount of Labour Members supporting it, and yours does not, so a merger might be beneficial for you to get your debate across the line.

Bradley Thomas: If the Committee wants me to solicit the requisite number of signatures from Labour MPs to bolster the application, I am happy to do that. We did submit this with the signatures provided simply because I did not know when this Committee would next be meeting, but if the Committee wants me to go away and get those signatures, I am happy to do so.

Mary Glendon: That was the other question I was going to ask, and it would be a requirement if you went for a separate debate.

Bradley Thomas: I can go away and do that.

Chair: Thank you. With that caveat, please supply the names to the Clerks. You do not have to come back and re-present your application.

Alex Mayer made representations.

Q31 **Chair:** The next application is from Alex Mayer for a debate in Westminster Hall on either a Tuesday or Thursday on the future of the UK coach industry.

Alex Mayer: Thank you ever so much, Chair. I am pitching for a debate on coaches, because there has not been one for some time. The last stand-alone debate on the issue of coaches was back in December 2020, as far as I can see. It is a debate that a lot of MPs could get involved in. Many MPs have a coach company in their constituency. There are about 2,500 across the country, and they are predominantly SMEs and family-owned businesses.

It is also something you can come at from so many different angles. There are over 600,000 coaches taking children to school. They are good for the environment, because they take people off the roads. They are good for the economy, and they are good for tourism.

Coaches do not often get to have their own stand-alone day or their own stand-alone anything; they often fall between other things. They are debated with buses, as an add-on, when we are talking about recruiting drivers or the transition to greener vehicles, and they are often lumped in with HGVs in Government strategies. I think it is time to have a stand-alone debate especially for coaches.

Q32 **Alison Hume:** Thank you for bringing this application to us. Do you have any preference between a Westminster Hall debate on a Tuesday morning or a Thursday afternoon, noting that demand for Tuesday mornings is higher?

Alex Mayer: I am utterly flexible.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much. The Clerks will be in touch with you in due course.

Sarah Dyke made representations.

Q33 **Chair:** Last but by no means least, Alistair Carmichael is not able to be with us, so Sarah Dyke is substituting, with an application for a debate in the Chamber on UK food security.

Sarah Dyke: Thank you very much. I am pleased to be here to support Alistair Carmichael's application for a debate on food security. Policy challenges relating to farming and food security have been a topic of immense interest to the public and to Parliament in recent months. There are myriad policy areas worth discussing in a parliamentary debate on the UK's food security. Indeed, I presented my own good food Bill in the last Session and will do so again. The conflict in the middle east has driven up fuel, fertiliser and other farming input costs, which is going to have a



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knock-on impact on the cost of food. There are changing policies such as the family farm tax, and we still have issues around environmental land management schemes, sustainable farming initiatives and suchlike.

There is a clear and broad consensus that food security is an essential part of our national security, but to date, there has not been a great deal of debate and policy detail to flesh out exactly what meaningful food security in the long term will look like. This debate will be an opportunity to move that discussion forward.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, has been holding a number of inquiries connected with UK food security, including on land use, climate change, animal and plant health, food supply chain fairness and the future of farming as a whole. The Chair of that Committee, Alistair Carmichael, is interested in working with the Backbench Business Committee to use this debate as an informal mechanism to engage with a wider range of MPs, both on the Committee and not. You will see that a significant number of cross-party MPs have signed the application, including five Select Committee Chairs.

Q34 Will Stone: You mentioned in the application and in your speech just then that you would like the debate to inform some of the EFRA Committee's current inquiries. What timelines would you need to adhere to to make that happen? Secondly, as you heard, we have a long waiting list for the Chamber. I know this is probably for Alistair to answer, but do you think he would consider a Westminster Hall debate instead, to bring the debate forward?

Sarah Dyke: I think Alistair would prefer a Chamber debate, and there is lots of connectivity with quite a few of the presentations we have heard today. I have had communication from him while we have been here to say that he would consider a Westminster Hall debate, but given the number of signatures that are on the application—there are beyond 50, and the number is growing—and the importance of the national debate around this, with food security being part of our national security, I think it does deserve a Chamber debate, and it will be very well attended.

Chair: Thank you very much, Sarah, and thank you for your patience. The Clerks will be in touch with you and Alistair in due course. That concludes the public business of the Committee. The Committee will now go into private session to consider the applications and allocate time accordingly.