

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Preparation for COP26, HC 222

Thursday 11 March 2021

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Members present: Philip Dunne (Chair); Duncan Baker; Barry Gardiner; Helen Hayes; Ian Levy; Caroline Lucas; Cherilyn Mackrory; Jerome Mayhew; John McNally; Dr Matthew Offord.

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee Member present: Darren Jones

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Member present: Neil Parish

Foreign Affairs Committee Member present: Stewart Malcolm McDonald

International Development Committee Member present: Chris Law

Liaison Committee Member present: Sir Bernard Jenkin

Science and Technology Committee Member present: Greg Clark

Scottish Affairs Committee Member present: Andrew Bowie

Transport Committee Member present: Huw Merriman

Treasury Committee Member present: Anthony Browne

Questions 77 - 133

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, President Designate at COP26; Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, COP26 Unit, Cabinet Office; Ros Eales, Chief Operating Officer, COP26 Unit, Cabinet Office; and Dr John Murton, UK COP26 Envoy, COP26 Unit, Cabinet Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alok Sharma, Peter Hill, Ros Eales and Dr John Murton.

Q77 Chair: Good morning and welcome to a special meeting of the Environmental Audit Committee, which, as so often for our Committee, is a parliamentary first. We have guests from nine other Select Committees for our session today, the first session of a new arrangement that parliamentary Select Committees have agreed with the COP26 President Designate, the Rt Hon Alok Sharma, for parliamentary scrutiny of the preparations for the COP26 meeting in Glasgow in November.

I am delighted to have Alok Sharma today and would like him to introduce himself very briefly. Then we will introduce the team of officials who are joining him.

Alok Sharma: Thank you, Chair. Alok Sharma, President Designate for COP26.

Peter Hill: Hello, Chair. Peter Hill, CEO of the COP Unit.

Ros Eales: Good morning. Ros Eales, chief operating officer of the COP Unit.

Dr Murton: Good morning. John Murton, COP26 envoy within the COP Unit.

Q78 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. This session is a first. It is focused on the machinery of government for delivery of a successful conference. It follows last night's Estimates Day debate on the Floor of the House of Commons—which was secured by Darren Jones, chair of the BEIS Select Committee, who is with us today, I am pleased to say—at which the President Designate identified for the first time in a parliamentary debate the current progress on COP26.

Alok, as a Committee we had called for the role of President of COP26 to be a dedicated role, so we were particularly pleased when you chose—with the blessing of the Prime Minister—to split your previous roles as Secretary of State for Business and COP26 President and went with the latter. How has this change in role enabled you to do your job better?

Alok Sharma: The simple answer is that I am now focusing all my time and energy on this particular role. We made quite a lot of progress in 2020. I had a significant number of bilateral engagements with Governments around the world. I did a whole bunch of virtual events and managed to do three visits. Going full time has meant that I am able to do a lot more in terms of virtual meetings with Governments and other stakeholders, as well as traveling more. Taking into account the Covid restrictions, following all the rules and so on, we have visited eight countries since I went into this role full time. A key part of the engagement is to talk to Governments. That has made a big difference.



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Going full time has been welcomed by you, Chair, and by other Committee members and also by the climate community. This is a role based in the Cabinet, and I continue to chair the Cabinet Implementation Committee when it comes to climate. That has been greatly appreciated. It has demonstrated that, for the Prime Minister, this is a vital summit that he wants to get absolutely right.

Q79 Chair: What access do you have to the Prime Minister? Can you call on him to make the important phone calls to other world leaders at will?

Alok Sharma: I have very regular access to the PM in terms of both meeting in physical settings and also keeping him informed of what I have been doing through written communications.

We had John Kerry here on Monday, and the Prime Minister joined that discussion. He is on the record as having said that climate action is a top priority for this Government. A number of colleagues on this call will have been at the Liaison Committee some weeks ago, where it was pretty clear that he sees COP26 as a big agenda item this year for the Government.

I worked with the Prime Minister when he was Foreign Secretary. His focus on protecting nature, on biodiversity and on climate change was very evident in the work he was leading when he was at the Foreign Office.

At the end of last year, we organised a Climate Ambition Summit to mark the five-year anniversary of Paris, co-hosted by the Prime Minister. More recently, at the UN Security Council he chaired the first-ever debate on climate and security together.

This is very front and centre of the Prime Minister's mind and, yes, absolutely, he raises this in his conversations with world leaders. That will continue.

I feel very comfortable about the access I have to him and the support I have from him.

Q80 Chair: This session will get into much of the nitty-gritty of the way the Government are supporting you in delivering a successful conference. You mentioned climate action. There is a Climate Action Strategy Committee. When did that last meet, and what role is that playing in aligning the UK's path to net zero with the UK's priorities for COP26?

Alok Sharma: That committee meets at key moments. In fact, there will be another meeting of the strategy committee in the coming weeks. The role of that committee, which is chaired by the Prime Minister, is to set the strategy. There is a separate Climate Action Implementation Committee, which I chair. This supports the work of the Climate Action Strategy Committee in operationalising the agreements we have reached on strategy and policies.

Q81 Chair: I am pleased to hear the strategy committee is meeting in a few



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weeks' time because it has met only once before, as far as we can tell. There is very little published information about its meetings.

Alok Sharma: It will be meeting in a few weeks. The last meeting was last year, in the autumn. I want to emphasise the fact that the implementation committee is there to follow up on the agreements of the strategy committee. We have met several times already as part of that particular committee. I also have opportunities for bilateral discussions with individual Cabinet colleagues who lead portfolios where we are looking to reduce emissions.

Q82 **Chair:** Do you have the power to convene official meetings with other Ministers precisely to address the inconsistencies in policy that are inevitable across the portfolio of Government and could cause embarrassment in the run-up to COP26?

Alok Sharma: I certainly am able to convene meetings, and we have the implementation committee. There are also opportunities to raise issues with colleagues on a bilateral basis. There are other committee structures. Through the process of write-around, you can make people aware of views.

To support all of these Cabinet committees, we also have an officials' grouping, the Climate National Strategy Implementation Group, or NSIG. I will ask Peter Hill if he wants to comment briefly on that. The aim of this group is to bring together and ensure a whole of Government approach to climate policy. Chair, with your permission, could I ask Peter Hill to come in?

Chair: Very briefly, because we then need to move on. We have a lot of questions to get through.

Peter Hill: Yes, I will be very brief. That committee, which is supported by BEIS and the Cabinet Office, meets on a regular basis. It covers all the net zero domestic measures you would expect. It also covers the COP plans, COP strategy and COP progress in support of the Climate Action Implementation Committee, or CAI. It is the structure of Government that you would expect. There is a lot of other governance under it that we can talk about, if it is of interest, at a later time.

Q83 **Chair:** How often does it meet?

Peter Hill: I would have to check, but I think the NSIG meets every month.

Chair: Very good. Thank you. We now have three sets of questions from members of the Environmental Audit Committee before we move over to our guests from other Committees, starting with Caroline Lucas. I am going to ask everyone, including the witnesses, to please try to keep their section of questions to six minutes.

Q84 **Caroline Lucas:** What responsibility do you believe you now have for the



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delivery of Government climate policies? Would you agree with the Committee on Climate Change, which said, "Strong domestic action will provide the basis for the UK Government's vital international leadership in the coming year"?

Alok Sharma: Yes. In the year leading up to the point at which we announced our own NDC, it was very clear when I was asking other Governments to come forward with ambition that they would also ask me what the UK will do. The fact that we have delivered a very ambitious NDC gives us an enormous amount of credibility. It is also what we have managed to do in terms of bringing emissions down. Since 2000, we are probably leading when it comes to bringing emissions down across the G20 nations. A statistic I have used before is that, in the last 30 years, we have managed to cut our emissions by 43% but grow our economy by 75% at the same time. That has happened under successive Governments.

Q85 **Caroline Lucas:** Can I stop you there, sorry? That figure is a little controversial, not least because it refers only to territorial emissions, not consumption emissions. If we factor in consumption emissions, the picture does not look so positive. The Committee on Climate Change itself, in its annual progress report from last year, said that the Government have failed to meet 17 out of 21 of their progress indicators and said, "Progress remains significantly offtrack in adaptation to build climate resilience".

What measures are available to you if you find the policies being developed in Government Departments risk contradicting the presidency objectives?

Alok Sharma: I would give the same answer that I gave to the Chair earlier. We have a structure, for the first time ever, and we are putting together our policies on net zero collectively sitting around a formal committee structure. That is what we are doing.

I certainly do not underestimate the amount of work that we all collectively need to do. We have had this discussion on carbon budgets before. Yes, we need to do more in terms of closing the gap on CB4 and CB5 and, of course, CB6 will have to be set out during this year as well.

There is a lot of progress that is being made, and we are continuing to look at additional work in this area. That is why it is so helpful, Caroline, to have the committee structures that we have.

Q86 **Caroline Lucas:** I want to get at whether you have any privileged role in terms of being able to push to meet the gap you have acknowledged. We know that the 10-point plan the Prime Minister published last year contains a 55% gap in terms of meeting even the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, which are based only on an 80% emission reduction, not even net zero.

Given that very big gap, and given that it affects your credibility as the



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President Designate of COP26, do you have a privileged role, for example, to suggest to the Government that going ahead with a coalmine in Cumbria or more fossil fuel licences in the North Sea right now is not helpful to the perception of credible leadership at home?

Alok Sharma: We have a committee structure, and we are looking to see in terms of the policies that come through individual Departments how we close the gaps in our carbon budgets and how we close the gap in meeting our NDC. That is work we do collectively. I have opportunities through chairing the implementation committee to broker agreements across Cabinet colleagues and Departments, and that is a role I am playing.

You mentioned the issue of coal. The UK has a pretty good record when it comes to coal. In 2012, I think, about 40% of our energy mix was coming from coal, and it is less than 2% now.

Q87 **Caroline Lucas:** With respect, you will accept and you are reported as recognising that it is not helpful for the Government to be seen to be opening a new coalmine, the first in 30 years, on the eve of COP26. Indeed, if the Government go ahead with these new licences in the North Sea, it will also not be helpful for that perception. I want to get at whether you have any special role, in your role as President Designate, in trying to get the Government to be in alignment with our Paris commitments.

Alok Sharma: The fact is that we are legally required to get to net zero by 2050, and along that path we have to have our NDCs and we are legally bound when it comes to our carbon budgets. We have to adhere to that. We are working on those policies.

With regard to this coalmine, I have been asked about this at the BEIS Select Committee and I have set out my views there. I have been asked about it in the House, and I have set out my views. This is a local matter. Let us wait and see what Cumbria County Council comes forward with.

Q88 **Caroline Lucas:** I cannot really believe that you think it is a local matter when it will have a significant impact both on our emissions and on our reputation as President of COP26. Maybe I could push you on one last thing.

Chair: Very briefly, Caroline. We are at the end now.

Caroline Lucas: I would love an answer on the issuing of licences in the North Sea in the coming weeks. Can you give us any indication that we might not be going ahead with yet more fossil fuel exploration at this critical point?

Alok Sharma: Caroline, at the end of the day, it is a policy issue that sits under BEIS, and we will have to wait and see what comes forward on that. All I can tell you is that overall, when we look to see how we can meet our carbon budgets, how we can meet our NDC and how we can meet our commitment to net zero by 2050, that work goes on through



the two committees the Prime Minister has set up. We are working very hard to make sure we deliver on our commitments.

Q89 Barry Gardiner: Mr President Designate, first, can I say how much we welcome the openness and the engagement you are giving both to Committees and to Back Benchers? I want to ask you about the Budget and three particular signals it gave out about the UK's progress to net zero.

First, if this Budget was going to show that we are serious about our NDC, people will ask why one of the biggest items was £25 billion on a 130% super-deductible tax relief, which allows oil and gas corporates to claim billions without any environmental conditions attached.

Secondly, one of the key themes that you are pressing at COP is nature-based solutions. That is great, but there is no substantial new money for nature-based solutions in the Budget. You have £40 million for the second tranche of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Where is the £1 billion a year that even the Prime Minister's own father is calling for? The Treasury may have commissioned the Dasgupta review, but it does not seem to have acted on it.

Thirdly, the Green Homes Grant is failing because of a lack of skills. It is on track to deliver just 8% of its own target—that is 48,000 homes—when we have 29 million that need retrofitting. The problem is that there is no skills base to deliver it. In Cabinet, did you press for the Budget to deliver major training programmes to create the skills that will drive the new net-zero economy?

Alok Sharma: My role now is delivery of COP26 and chairing the implementation committee that we have on climate. There is a whole range of discussions that will go through individual Departments in addition to all of that work.

If I may address the points that you have raised, Barry, the first issue was funding going to green projects—

Barry Gardiner: The super-deductibles.

Alok Sharma: Yes. I will outline some of the measures in this Budget. You will have seen the announcement of the National Infrastructure Bank. This is about making sure that the infrastructure we have meets our net-zero targets. The Chancellor has announced £12 billion for that. You will have seen the announcement of a new UK working group on voluntary carbon markets. You will have seen the announcement on green retail bonds.

In fact, if you look at the 10-point plan announced in the autumn, there was £12 billion allocated to that, but the key thing is to make sure we get leverage from the private sector. Our view is that we should be able to get three times the leverage on the £12 billion that is being provided.



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With some of those announcements as part of the 10-point plan we have also brought forward funding in terms of offshore wind infrastructure—

Q90 Barry Gardiner: I accept that the Government are doing things like the green funding and the green gilts in the 10-point plan, and those are good, but they are old announcements. I am specifically referring here to the Budget and the announcements that were made in the Budget.

The biggest announcement was £25 billion in this super-deductible, yet the vast majority of that could very well go to the infrastructure of oil and gas corporates setting up the new licences that Caroline Lucas asked you about. This is surely a huge lacuna in the green credentials as we move towards COP.

Alok Sharma: The Chancellor is also looking to stimulate the economy, looking to stimulate investment and looking to support jobs, which all of us want to see happen.

Q91 Barry Gardiner: Put on a green filter and I am totally with you. Have the super-deductible, but make sure it is for green investment and green infrastructure.

Alok Sharma: Going back to this point about what else there was in this Budget when it comes to green, we have talked about the National Infrastructure Bank. I go back to the announcement the Chancellor made some weeks ago on TCFD and mandatory disclosure across the economy by 2025. I can tell you that the Chancellor and the Treasury are absolutely committed to the overall Government plans when it comes to net zero.

You also talked about the issue of nature. The Prime Minister announced £3 billion of ICF funding to be ring-fenced for nature, which very many people welcomed.

On the issue of skills, there is a lot of work going on in terms of a Green Jobs Taskforce that the BEIS Secretary of State is leading on, and also a lot of work in terms of skills, where BEIS is working with the DfE and the DWP. This is work that I was involved with when I was BEIS Secretary of State.

It is unfair to say that, somehow, the Government are not doing work on skills. We very much recognise this is a priority, and we need to move it forward.

Q92 Barry Gardiner: I am talking about the messages that the Budget was sending out. You talked about the Bank of England. I welcome the change to the remit of the Bank of England. But the Exchequer Secretary the other day was unable to say to the Committee that the corporate bond portfolio of the Bank of England, which is currently aligned to 3.5°, would be realigned to 1.5°. If the Exchequer Secretary cannot say that this is part of what is going on, then it is of real concern, isn't it?

Chair: Thank you, Barry. A very quick response, Mr President, and then



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we will move on.

Alok Sharma: I am sure HMT will have listened to the views you express, but overall I have certainly found the Chancellor particularly to be very supportive of our overall green agenda.

Chair: Thank you, Barry. You got five questions into your six minutes, which is a record for you on our Committee.

Q93 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Good morning, Mr President. Thank you for your time today.

I watched the Estimates debate yesterday and you described COP26 as a time when we are making a decisive and positive movement in the battle against climate change. It really is a key time and we have to get it right.

I want to talk to you today about resources and how many policy officials you have at your disposal in COP26. I believe you said something along the lines of 200 officials, but can you break down for the Committee how many of those work within your Department and how many work across other Government Departments?

Alok Sharma: I said there were 200 posts in the COP Unit and we have had colleagues seconded from other parts of the Government into this. We also have Nigel Topping, who is the UN high-level champion, who also has a team of private-sector folk seconded to support him in the engagement he is doing with non-state actors.

In terms of policy, I will perhaps ask Peter Hill to come in on some of this, but we have around 140 folks focused on policy. Also, there are other Departments like BEIS, DEFRA and HMT. We will also have colleagues sitting in those Departments who are focused on the COP agenda and the COP campaigns we are running.

The other point is the support that is coming through the FCDO. Apart from the fact that all heads of mission have been told that the COP objectives are a top priority for them, we also have our network of around 430 climate energy attachés across the globe, who are also focused on this issue.

When I have done visits, it is very clear to me that this is a big priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office network. They are very keen to make sure we deliver on COP26.

Peter Hill: Those 200 people are in the COP Unit. The teams around Whitehall are additional to that. I guess about 10% of those are experts from outside Government who have been seconded in. Of that number, off the top of my head, roughly a third are on operations and delivery. This is a very large event, and it is a very significant undertaking. Two thirds are on policy and negotiations.

Q94 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Thank you. That is really helpful. You also mentioned yesterday that it is important that the right resources are



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made available for this summit but also that it needs to be value for money because it is taxpayers' money after all.

Do you have the budget you need to secure more resource should you need it? That is a really important answer to give, separate to what I am going to ask you next.

You talked about the private sponsorship. What are you gathering in addition to Government resources from your private sponsors in the run-up to the event?

Alok Sharma: We are working our way through the budgets and we are making sure that we are focusing on costs and making sure we get procurement right.

Do I feel that we are adequately supported? The answer is yes. If that were not the case, I would certainly go and make the case to the Prime Minister and other colleagues, but I certainly feel that we are currently well supported.

Peter Hill or, indeed, Ros Eales, who is the chief operating officer, may want to comment on the nitty-gritty and whether we have the resources.

In terms of the sponsorship, yes, I set out seven principal sponsors yesterday. We are working to get some more on track. At the appropriate point, these contracts will be set out.

Peter, did you want to comment specifically on budgets and sponsorship funding?

Peter Hill: You have covered it, COP President. We have the resources and we are doing our job, as you would expect, of bearing down on costs and ensuring we are getting value for money from all aspects of the budget. At the moment, we have a good, hard-working, hard-pressed team. If we felt we needed more resource, as the COP President says, I would speak to him and I am sure he would then have the conversations that he needed to have.

Cherilyn Mackrory: Thank you. I will hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Cherilyn. That concludes questions from members of the Environmental Audit Committee.

We will now move to our guests. We will start with Sir Bernard Jenkin, the Chair of the Liaison Committee. I would like to acknowledge Sir Bernard's help in bringing the 10 Committees together. He is also a member of the Public Accounts Committee, which has recently opined on the path to net-zero Britain.

Q95 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Thank you very much. It is good to see you, Mr President Designate, if we have to call you that.

Thank you for the points you made in the debate yesterday about the



machinery of government. We still feel a bit light on the detail and the substance of this. We were expecting a written ministerial statement at some stage. Do you know when that will come out?

Alok Sharma: Yes. I hope we will lay it next week. I am aware that you have raised this previously, so definitely next week.

Q96 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** What are the points at issue that are delaying it at the moment?

Alok Sharma: We want to make sure that we have the right level of detail for you. I am committing now that we will lay this early next week.

Q97 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Thank you. The effort here is to achieve a summit of global proportions that produces a communiqué that really moves things forward and matches the output of the Paris summit. This is a huge diplomatic undertaking. Laurent Fabius, the former French Prime Minister, apparently had 200 diplomats at his personal disposal to conduct this. How far are we down the track with the draft communiqué?

Alok Sharma: We are eight months away. I am focusing on the core issues that I identified yesterday in the debate, asking countries to come forward with their net-zero commitments, and those near-term emission reduction targets and NDCs as well. We have made some progress when it comes to net-zero commitments in—

Q98 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** I am going to stop you because we are so short of time. I understand the point you are making. Unless the communiqué is pretty well in final form by the time we get to the summit, it cannot be negotiated at the summit. The real negotiations will happen long before we get to the summit.

To that end, I am a little disturbed that the Climate Action Strategy Committee is meeting very rarely because the machinery you are part of reflects the Brexit machinery. Lord Frost was in and out of the Prime Minister's office on a daily basis as the negotiations were taking place.

If you are to have the authority in Whitehall, you need the same instant access and continuous attention of the Prime Minister. Even if the implementation committee is not meeting very often, I would expect it to be meeting weekly as it deals with all the issues arising from relations with the other states. When will the pace be upped?

Alok Sharma: The pace is up. To separate it out, first, I feel that I have pretty regular access to the Prime Minister and, if I wanted more access, I am pretty sure it would be available.

The issue, as you have quite rightly identified, is what we are doing—apart from asking for these commitments on mitigation and adaptation and so on—to close off the elements of the Paris rulebook. We are talking about negotiations across 197 countries. We have a negotiating team, which is working day and night on this issue. From a time zone perspective, they are literally working day and night on this issue. I have



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a regular dialogue with the chairs of the negotiating groups that are part of the UNFCCC process. We are looking to make headway through the various mandates we have been given.

One issue we have is that we are not able to meet in person in the same way that would have been possible previously. We are looking to see how those discussions move forward in a virtual or hybrid setting. There is this idea that, somehow, we are sitting on our hands and that the process of discussing the issues is not happening. It most certainly is.

Q99 Sir Bernard Jenkin: Peter Hill, what is the daily, weekly or monthly cycle of meetings that you could tell us about? Not the contents of those meetings and not the advice you have given to Ministers, but what is the pattern of those meetings that you feel gives this pace and momentum?

Peter Hill: In addition to the governance that supports the NSIG, I have a monthly board that brings together all DGs. We have a monthly policy board. Each of the campaigns has its own governance. The negotiations are happening on a daily basis through daily contacts. They are not formal negotiations, but they are everything we can achieve short of formal negotiations.

We do not lack for co-ordination and action across Government, both at the strategic level and on the individual campaigns and areas the COP President has outlined: mitigation, adaptation, finance. They all have their own governance to drive progress across Whitehall and to give us the platform we need to engage with other countries. It is not that there is a format for this internationally. It is a daily business of talking to 197 countries.

Q100 Sir Bernard Jenkin: My very final question is again to Peter Hill. Presumably, there is some objective setting for the heads of mission in all the countries to decide the targets and what we are seeking to achieve. How have those objectives been set, and how confident are you that those objectives are being given the priority they deserve?

Chair: If you could answer briefly, I would appreciate it.

Peter Hill: Yes. Every country has a plan for the climate outcomes we want this year, and that plan is focused particularly on the biggest emitters where we have to make the most progress—

Sir Bernard Jenkin: That is our plan, not their plan.

Peter Hill: This is the UK's plan for what we want from every country, which is agreed with the post in question. There are regular calls. The COP President has addressed all ambassadors and has regular calls with all our ambassadors to both communicate and encourage. John has those as well. Those happen at every level on a regular basis. Every ambassador has received a very clear message from the Foreign and Development Secretary and from the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office about the priority they attach to COP and climate action in 2021.



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Sir Bernard Jenkin: Thank you both very much. Terrific.

Chair: Thank you, Sir Bernard. Now I would like to welcome Darren Jones, the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

Q101 **Darren Jones:** Good morning, Mr President Designate. We were happy to have the long debate on the Floor of the House of Commons yesterday, and I share my gratitude to you for making yourself and your team so available to us across our different capacities in Parliament.

There was a discussion about the longer-term net-zero commitments that are being welcomed by many countries around the world, but there is a gap between that and the climate action plans that really make credible progress in the next decade ahead. We have heard that you have a plan for where you would like each country to land by COP26. Which countries are keeping you awake at night at the moment?

Alok Sharma: We have made some progress when it comes to the commitment to global net zero, in that we now have 70% of the world's economy committed to it. It was around 30% when we took over the presidency.

But the UNFCCC's NDC census report, which came out last month, showed that we have a lot more to do to get countries to come forward with those near-term emission reduction targets. We have a lot of focus there. The NDCs that were reported and came out by the end of 2020 covered around 30% of global emissions. There is a big chunk to go.

Peter Hill talked about the focus on big emitters. I have returned in recent weeks from a trip to India, where I had pretty detailed discussions on these issues. I have had discussions with Xie Zhenhua, who has now been appointed as the Chinese climate envoy and is pretty steeped in all of this stuff.

The US is really important as part of this. It is great news that we have an Administration now in the US that is totally committed to action on climate change. But the world will look to see what the US does in terms of its own NDC and its own development finance.

I have been to the EU and met with Frans Timmermans again a few weeks ago. The EU has already set out an NDC of 55%.

There has been some progress over the past year, but there has to be a doubling down of progress when it comes to NDCs over the next eight months.

Q102 **Darren Jones:** In terms of that gap, there has been a lot of concern, for example, about China's new five-year plan, which seems to be pushing back some of the difficult decisions later in the timescale to its 2060 target, as opposed to making sufficient progress in the next decade. Do you share those concerns?



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Alok Sharma: We certainly want China, as well as other countries, to be more ambitious. There is no doubt about that. That is a dialogue we have with our Chinese counterparts. I have said that I will work with like-minded countries around the world so that we can try to influence others as well.

On China, it may be useful if I bring in John Murton, if that is okay, Chair. John, do you want to say something on China and the latest on the five-year plan?

Dr Murton: The final five-year plan is yet to be published. We have seen the work report and we will see it when it is formally published. Then we will need some time to digest the contents.

The COP President has implied that the five-year plan stretches out to 2025, but the NDC that will be published in due course by China will stretch out to 2030. We will be looking not just at the five-year plan but also at the content of the NDC. We are urging all countries to ensure that their NDCs are consistent with their pathways to net zero.

Q103 **Darren Jones:** In terms of this plan that you have in the Cabinet Office COP team about where you would like each country to land, presumably you have a colour rating and some countries have red against their name. Are you happy to elaborate on which countries those are and whether you have a hit squad of climate diplomats to fly in and try to make sufficient progress there?

Alok Sharma: We will have to try to work even more closely with some countries to get them to come forward with ambition. You will forgive me. I am not going to set out the full plan at this meeting. We have talked about the big emitters. We have talked about how we need to make progress with them. Apart from the countries I have outlined, there are countries in the G20 from which we will want to see more progress.

There is an opportunity. We have a range of leader-level events taking place this year. We are presiding over the G7. We have CHOGM and the G20. The US will be holding its own climate event on 22 April. At each of these points there is an opportunity to press and ask countries to come forward to set out ambitious targets.

I can assure you that, in all the discussions I have and the team has, we are pretty frank and direct with other Governments in terms of the level of ambition we would like from them.

Darren Jones: Thank you. That is my time, so I will hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much, Darren. I would now like to welcome Anthony Browne from the Treasury Select Committee.

Q104 **Anthony Browne:** Thank you, President Designate, for engaging with us.



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The Treasury Select Committee is doing an inquiry on green finance, and one of the five campaigns of COP26 is to make sure the global financial system eases the path to net zero rather than making it more difficult. Yet your predecessor Claire Perry said that the Treasury was highly resistant to hosting COP26. Are you getting enough organisational support from the Treasury in terms of the size of the team, and also from its bodies like the Bank of England?

Secondly, you have mentioned some of the policies the Treasury has in terms of greening finance: the green gilts, the Monetary Policy Committee getting a green remit and, most importantly probably, making climate-related financial disclosures mandatory. Are there other policies that are needed to green the international financial system?

Alok Sharma: The issue of support for COP26 across Government has been raised in previous Committees. I cannot speak for what happened before I arrived in the role, but since I have been in this role there has been support from across Government. In fact, Cabinet colleagues are very keen to be involved both as Departments and individually in supporting this work.

When it comes to the Treasury, I have a very good relationship with the Chancellor. He is very supportive of this agenda. It is not just him but the team behind him as well. There is a dedicated team working within the Treasury on COP26. We have pretty good engagement with them, pretty constructive engagement.

We are organising an event at the end of this month, a climate and development ministerial meeting, where we are bringing together Ministers from donor countries as well as from vulnerable developing countries and, in fact, civil society as well. That is to discuss the issue of finance for climate. The Treasury is involved as part of that work. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is involved as part of that work. DEFRA is involved as part of that work. There is a lot of cross-Government working that is ongoing on this agenda.

Q105 **Anthony Browne:** You have Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England, as the finance adviser to COP26. Can you explain exactly what his role is and how it fits in with the work that you are doing?

Alok Sharma: You raise a wider point about how else you get finance to climate. I have spent time talking to the MDBs and the DFIs, and you will know that there is a discussion in the public domain about the use of SDRs as well. There is a lot of discussion ongoing right now in terms of how we support countries with climate finance.

In relation to Mark Carney, Mark is focused on what I describe as creating a more sustainable financial system to support the pathway to net zero and, of course, this whole issue of making sure we embed climate in every financial decision. I have referenced and you have referenced the whole issue around TCFDs, which again is something that he is very



supportive of. Separately, he also chairs a taskforce on scaling voluntary carbon markets. This is a private sector-led initiative, so it is independent of the UK Government efforts in terms of hosting COP26, but that is again a piece of work that he is developing.

Anthony Browne: I would love to ask more questions, but I have run out of time. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much, Anthony. Now to Stewart McDonald, who is joining us from the Foreign Affairs Committee. Welcome, Stewart.

Q106 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Good morning, Mr President Designate and colleagues joining us.

You have already and your colleagues have already touched on the fact that this is a major priority for diplomatic missions overseas, embassies abroad and what else. Could you talk about how that is manifesting itself across the embassy network? What kinds of things are happening to show, in the countries that the UK is present in, that this is indeed a big priority?

Alok Sharma: Peter Hill talked about the fact that we have country plans, which we communicate and ensure that our missions around the world are informed of, and there is a consistent messaging that goes on. I will ask John Murton if he might want to come in and talk a little more about the structures of the Foreign Office and how some of this work is being done.

We can talk about the theory. What I can tell you from practice is that our missions are pretty engaged. In previous ministerial roles I was at the FCO and DfID, and many of the heads of mission that we have are people I have worked with, whether it is Karen Pierce in Washington, Barbara Woodward at the UN or Caroline Wilson in Beijing. These are all folks that I have worked with. I have a pretty regular dialogue with them. When I have meetings, either virtual or physical on visits, we always make sure there are representatives of the FCDO who are present as part of that. I personally feel pretty well supported by the network around the world.

John Murton, do you want to elaborate on any of this in terms of the structures of how it is working?

Dr Murton: Thank you, COP President. Certainly, we have an international engagement team within the COP Unit, which contains about 30 people, and many of them, like myself, are on loan from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I am a serving diplomat. I have spent a long time overseas, and many of my colleagues in the IE team likewise. We are joined by the climate diplomacy team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office under the guidance of the Foreign Secretary's Special Representative for Climate Change, Nick Bridge. As the COP President Designate has said, every ambassador around the network has a personal objective relating to climate change



and COP26. Through the FCDO network, we have what we believe is the world's largest network of climate and energy attachés around the world. As the COP President Designate said, over 460 staff, over nearly 200 full-time equivalent staff working on climate change full-time in support of the team.

What we see around the network is that climate change and COP26 is mainstreamed into the work of embassies. For example, when Nigel Topping, the high-level action champion, was recently in Kenya, the high commission hosted a roundtable on green finance. That is the sort of thing you see around the world on an ongoing basis in support of our COP26 objectives.

Q107 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Thank you, Dr Murton. Colleagues will know I am here wearing two hats, one as a Foreign Affairs Committee member and the second as a Glasgow Member of Parliament. Indeed, COP will be about 20 minutes from where I am sat right now, so we are looking forward to welcoming you all.

If the Chair will indulge me with my Glasgow MP hat on for a minute, COP President, this is obviously a major event in the city. We are looking forward to hosting it. You might need to be worried in that the SNP leader of the council here sings your praises quite often. That might not do your promotion prospects well. Can I ask about the legacy that we can expect in Glasgow? What we do not want is for the international circus to turn up, and then, when it is all done, it is all forgotten about. What can we expect from the UK Government side to be the legacy of COP for the city of Glasgow?

Alok Sharma: Thank you for that. I will ask Ros Eales, who is leading on this as chief operating officer, but I have met our key delivery partners, including the leader of the council, in autumn last year. Of course, when I am able to, I will go again. That is working well.

In terms of how we involve the people of Glasgow and, in fact, people across the country to energise them as part of this, that is going to be really important. This came up in the debate yesterday. On a very practical level, we have asked for volunteers from the Glasgow area to help during the time of COP. As I said yesterday, 7,000 have applied. We are only looking for around 1,000 people as part of this, so that is incredibly encouraging. We have the Together for Our Planet campaign that we launched late last year. That will build up during this year, and it is about, again, getting people across the UK to get involved in thinking about climate action, taking climate action themselves. We are working on what is going to be the legacy going forward from COP26. Hopefully, we will have success in terms of what we are trying to achieve of the goals that I set out in the debate yesterday, but also what this will physically mean in terms of the legacy.



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I am very happy to come to future Committees to talk a little more about that when we have firmed up our thoughts. Ros, I do not know if there is anything operationally you want to say about Glasgow specifically.

Ros Eales: It is just worth mentioning the plans for our green zone, which is a public engagement space that will be sitting in the Glasgow Science Centre opposite the SEC, which will be the blue zone, the UNFCCC site. That will be a space that we are going to design to engage the local community of Glasgow and those who are interested in climate change and want to get involved. I see that very much as a space where we can educate people and where we can hear different voices, and I think that is a really important piece of the legacy that we want to leave behind.

We are working very closely with Glasgow City Council on its plans across the city and what it is going to do. We have good partnerships. As the COP President said, it is something we are thinking about very carefully, including from a sustainability perspective.

Chair: Thank you very much, Ros, and thank you, Stewart. Now to Chris Law. Welcome, Chris, from the International Development Committee.

Q108 **Chris Law:** Thank you, Philip, and I would like to welcome Mr President Designate. We knew each other previously when he was International Development Secretary.

On that note, when the UK Government were committed to 0.7% of GNI, what impact is the current Prime Minister's devastating decision to now reduce that commitment likely to have on climate mitigation and adaptation programmes in developing countries, and have these developing countries raised concerns about these dramatic cuts in discussions with you about COP26?

Alok Sharma: The first thing I would say is that, yes, of course there has been an overall drop in the percentage of GNI that is going towards development, but I think, as the Chancellor said, that is a temporary measure. I would just say—I have made this point before, but I think it is worth making once again—that we are still going to be spending more than £10 billion next year in terms of ODA. If you look at the average of the countries that make up the OECD's DAC, we are still above that average. When it comes to climate—

Chris Law: The question I am asking is what impact the cuts are going to have.

Alok Sharma: Yes, indeed. I am just about to come on to that point. As part of the funding envelope, what we have done is protect ICF. The Prime Minister announced a doubling of that back in 2019 at UNGA, and that has been protected. That is £11.6 billion, 2021 to 2025. From my perspective, this is something that countries around the world are pleased with.



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When I have discussions, people are still very engaged with this whole process. They want to work with us to make COP26 a success. Of course, as part of those discussions, the key discussion is around the £100 billion figure that donor countries have promised. We need to make sure that we deliver on that.

The discussion very quickly moves on to: how do you get private finance, alongside public money, into green infrastructure, into the renewables sector? There is a discussion on what the multilateral development banks are doing. You will know that the World Bank has said that 35% of funding will now be targeted towards green projects. As I said earlier, there has been this discussion about special drawing rights as well.

I would say to you that we have protected the climate funding, and countries continue to be pretty engaged, but it is not just about public finance. They are also looking to see how we can support them through other work when it comes to private finance as well.

Q109 Chris Law: Given that the biggest impact of climate change is on the least developed countries, what consultation has there been or will there be in a meaningful way on shaping the agenda with those least developed countries, and what structures are already established, including within the Cabinet Office and other Departments, for this to succeed? For example, how many people are working on this? How senior are they? Where in Government do they sit? Who is leading this?

Alok Sharma: Sorry, Chris, just to be clear, you are talking about the focus on developing countries?

Chris Law: Yes. Because the biggest impacts of climate change are on them, I assume there will be a meaningful relationship with the least developed countries coming up to COP26, and I want to know how their voices are being properly established within those structures.

Alok Sharma: Absolutely. This is a really vital point. I hope what you will have seen in terms of the visits I have done so far is that I have aimed to go to countries that find themselves on the frontline of having to tackle climate change. I was in Nepal recently and saw some of the devastation that comes from a changing climate. We have this ministerial event at the end of this month and the developing countries, the vulnerable countries, those vulnerable to climate change, are very much part of that event, talking at the same table with the donor countries about issues around finance.

I can tell you that on a personal level I am very, very keen to champion the voice of developing nations. They are absolutely vital as part of this discussion. Another very important reason we want to try to make sure that the event we have in Glasgow is a physical event is that it is something parties around the world feel very strongly about, so that they can all sit at the same table and have these discussions.

Q110 Chris Law: If the Chair will permit me one more question, more



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domestically I want to ask how you are going about building a constructive partnership with devolved partners so they are fully engaged and are represented at COP26. Should there be a role for devolved leaders such as Nicola Sturgeon at COP, and does the President support the proposition of the previous President for COP26?

Chair: Very briefly, please.

Alok Sharma: I will just say that we have the devolved Administrations group that I chair. We have a meeting coming up later on this month, where we have the Climate Ministers from the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, as well as the territorial Secretaries of State who sit as part of that. After the last meeting we set out the minutes of that particular meeting. I am looking forward to another constructive meeting with them. We want this to be an all-of-the-UK event, for it to be inclusive. I have said that before, and that is what we are working towards.

Chair: We have some questions on this coming up shortly, so thank you very much indeed, Chris. Now I would like to welcome Greg Clark, the Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee.

Q111 **Greg Clark:** Thank you, President Designate, for joining us. This is a session on the machinery of government, and science, as we know, is going to be very important at the COP. We know that UK science is very strong. In terms of the organisation, do you have a chief scientific adviser?

Alok Sharma: We, of course, have ensured that we have consulted with all parts of Government as part of our preparation. That includes the Government Office for Science and UKRI, and we work with the Chief Scientific Adviser. In fact, he then corrals the departmental CSAs as part of the discussion. In fact, I think I am meeting him later this week to have a discussion. They are very much front and centre of the work that we are doing. You are right, science is absolutely the core of COP26.

Q112 **Greg Clark:** You mentioned CSAs, chief scientific advisers. We have in this country a chief scientific adviser in virtually every Government Department, and they play a very important leadership role. Given the importance of your team and the importance of science within it, would it not be good to have a chief scientific adviser at your right hand throughout this, totally devoted to it?

Alok Sharma: That is a very good question, Greg. I will ask if Peter Hill wants to come in and talk a little bit about how the structure is working in terms of our engagement with the CSAs across different Government Departments. I can say that, as part of the COP work, we are engaging with the CSA and with CSAs across Government Departments. It is a very intriguing point that you have raised. Peter, is there anything you want to add on this?

Peter Hill: We have a science team that we share with BEIS, and it has a lot of the expertise on this matter, and we have a lot of support from the



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BEIS CSA. We have a climate science advisory group that supports us, so that is the CSAs and the non-Government advisers, and with them we have set our science objectives, both what you might call the science research, science evidence point, but also science and innovation.

It is a very fair question. I do not think we lack for science and the mobilisation of a scientific community across Whitehall through those structures, and in turn they are mobilising their networks internationally, which is, of course, the key issue.

Q113 Greg Clark: As you both know, this structure has served us well. Perhaps you will take that away and consider whether it would be helpful in the months ahead.

Thinking internationally, you have mentioned the climate and energy attachés, President Designate, across our posts, our embassies and high commissions. You have not mentioned the Science and Innovation Network, and that again is diplomats we have abroad who are making a big contribution. Is it engaged?

Alok Sharma: Certainly. When I have meetings on visits I make every effort to meet with businesses, to meet with technology businesses, and, of course, I am joined for those meetings by the relevant person within the mission itself. Peter, do you or John Murton want to talk a little about how we are engaging with that grouping as well, because I think Greg has raised a very important point?

Peter Hill: Yes. We have the FCDO Science and Innovation Network, which I think is being referred to. It is involved in the work, and it is one of the key networks that we are using to try to influence, whether it is evidence on solutions or benefits or trade-offs. We are also trying to mobilise through the CSAs, their networks and the university networks, and the science and innovation teams are a key part of that in support of the objectives that we have agreed and communicated to them.

Q114 Greg Clark: We have been talking about ODA, and we know that climate science has made big use of the ODA funds that were available. We know that, for reasons we understand, it is going to be cut. Will the scientific funding for climate research that was provided through ODA continue, President Designate, and if so, is that going to be separately funded, or would it be taken from the existing BEIS science budget?

Alok Sharma: If the Chair will allow, perhaps I can either come back directly or get the relevant Department to write back on this issue. What I can say, as I said in response to an earlier question, is that overall the ICF budget has been protected, and obviously an element of that will relate to the work we are doing in science and technology. I will revert on this particular point.

Chair: By all means, please write if we have not managed to get through any of the questions that have been put during the course of the session. Now I would like to welcome Andrew Bowie from the Scottish Affairs



Committee.

Q115 **Andrew Bowie:** Good morning, Mr President Designate. Thank you for giving up your time this morning to be with us. I have three questions, and I will be very brief.

At the beginning of the COP26 process I think it is fair to say that relations between the Scottish Government and the UK Government, according to reports, were rather strained. Can you give us an update on how relations are at the minute, and how the devolved Administrations' ministerial committee has helped to bring things forward?

Alok Sharma: As I answered in response to an earlier question, I think we are working well at an operational level with the Scottish Government and, in fact, other delivery partners as well. We have a delivery framework, on which I will ask Ros Eales if she wants to come in and talk about. In terms of the devolved Administrations group, as I said, we have another meeting coming up later this month, and obviously I will be looking to agree the agenda of that with the individual attendees. I think that provides the forum for us to ensure that we are going to be delivering an all-of-the-UK COP.

In addition to that, I also chair a group of Mayors and regions, and that again provides a pretty good forum for feeding back on some of the issues that we ought to be thinking about when it comes to having an inclusive COP.

Ros, do you want to talk in a little more detail about the work that is going on together with the Scottish Government and the local council in Glasgow?

Ros Eales: Yes, of course. Operationally, it is absolutely paramount that we work very closely with the Scottish Government and the Scottish operational delivery partners, so there is extremely regular engagement on that. We have a monthly operational delivery board that Peter Hill chairs. We have a joint delivery framework that we have agreed with Scottish delivery partners, including the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council as well. Certainly, we are working very closely and that relationship is a strong one.

Alok Sharma: Yes. Sorry, Andrew, I do not know if you had another question, but I just want to come back on the point about the physical COP. But if you have another question, I am happy to take that first.

Q116 **Andrew Bowie:** Thank you, President Designate. It is specifically on the cost of policing and security. Police Scotland last year said it would create acute operational pressures, having to deliver COP. As it is a UK Government event, what discussions have been ongoing between the UK Government and the organisers regarding policing, security and the cost of providing that?



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Alok Sharma: We are working constructively with all our delivery partners. Ros, do you want to comment a little more on that?

Ros Eales: Yes, of course. We have a good relationship with Police Scotland. We have agreed some principles around funding that have been accepted by both sides. Marginal costs will be chargeable to COP26. That is very clear. Police Scotland is happy with the arrangements; the Scottish Government are happy with the funding arrangements.

Q117 **Andrew Bowie:** Earlier, new licences for the North Sea were raised. Obviously, Scotland, as well as hosting COP this year, is also the headquarters of Oil and Gas UK and the energy industry, and they are making huge strides in transitioning and investing in new technologies. What engagement has there been between the organisers of COP and Oil and Gas UK, and other bodies based in Scotland, given the huge investment they are moving towards to make the North Sea a net-zero basin with their Vision 2035 agenda and everything else? Would there be a drive possibly to take some of COP outwith Glasgow to other parts of Scotland that are, in fact, investing and driving forward this move very productively?

Alok Sharma: Peter, would you like to take that one? I then want to come back very briefly on the physical COP.

Peter Hill: We have had input from Oil and Gas UK, and have had discussions with them on moving COP outside Glasgow. We are looking at, as part of the Together for Our Planet campaign, a whole-of-UK approach, including which locations across the country we might want to hold events in in a drumbeat of moments. We are also thinking, or Ros's team is, around and about COP what we could do outside the city, whether that is showcasing, profiling or whatever else, recognising that we need to bear in mind that the main effort of the police and the operation of delivery partners will be on delivering the event itself. Yes, we are looking at what could be done to showcase and profile some of the great tech and some of the great industries the UK is doing.

Alok Sharma: Very briefly on this issue of the physical COP, as I said earlier, we are planning for a physical event. That is certainly what the parties want. Obviously, we are going to make sure that we have contingencies in place. None of us can predict precisely where we will be in eight months, and we also want to have an element of virtualisation to expand attendance, where people who previously would not have been able to come in can see what is happening. This element is going to be quite important going forward in terms of what we are doing, working with the local delivery partners to keep people safe, both the delegates and, of course, the people of Glasgow as well. I want to put on the record that we are very keen that we ensure that we are delivering a physical COP at Glasgow. That is what the parties want, and I think that is what will help us achieve our outcomes and goals as well.

Q118 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Andrew, and thank you, President



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Designate, for making that clear. Could you also confirm whether or not speculation is correct that we are considering providing or facilitating vaccination for delegates?

Alok Sharma: This issue has been raised, and the Chair of the BEIS Select Committee has also raised this with me. There are eight months to go. The good news is that we are seeing vaccination programmes roll out across the world, which is very good news. I have said before that we want this to be an inclusive COP. Obviously, this is one of the issues. Working with the UN—ultimately, this is an event we are organising on behalf of the UN—and others we will have to see how we can mitigate the risks of people not being able to come to Glasgow.

Chair: Thank you. We now have questions from the Chair of the Transport Select Committee, Huw Merriman. Welcome, Huw.

Q119 **Huw Merriman:** Good morning and thank you, Mr President Designate. Transport is now the largest contributor to UK domestic emissions, accounting for 28% of the total. Surface transport is about 70% of that transport carbon footprint. The Government and industry are seeking to roll out electric vehicle infrastructure and end the sale of petrol and diesel engines by 2030, decarbonising rail towards electrification, battery and hydrogen by 2040, and setting a target for all buses to be ultra-low or zero emission by 2025. What will you be doing in Glasgow to showcase our transport policies, targets and technology to ensure that other countries do likewise with their transport systems?

Alok Sharma: Thank you for that. Even ahead of Glasgow, we have a Zero Emission Vehicle Transition Council, which is an international ministerial group that I co-chair with Grant Shapps. We have had a meeting of that group. There is another meeting coming up. The Governments who are represented there cover about half of the global car market. We will look to see whether we can get other Governments involved as well. It is a pretty good forum for having a discussion more broadly around exactly the sorts of issues you are talking about: charging infrastructure, how you roll out electric vehicles, and discussions around phase-out dates for petrol and diesel. What has been very encouraging is how we have seen auto manufacturers in recent months come forward themselves and set out their own target dates for zero-emission vehicles. You saw GM setting out 2035. Ford has announced that all the cars it sells in Europe will be fully electric by 2030. I think Jaguar has set 2025 for its target date. That is all good news. Using that council to drive international ambition is, of course, absolutely vital.

On the issue of how we showcase all of this, we have the green zone. That will be an opportunity for us to showcase what UK business, and also academia and civil society, are doing in a lot of these areas across the five campaigns we are running. We have had submissions from lots of organisations. We are sifting through them now. I am confident that we will be able to showcase this.



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The final bit of this, of course, is that we are very keen to ensure that COP26 is carbon neutral. I will ask Ros to comment. She might want to comment on what we are doing particularly from the perspective of transport for delegates, leaders and others who are coming, how we will try to address the issue of lowering emissions when it comes to transport.

Ros Eales: Yes, reiterating that point, our COP will be fully carbon neutral. We will be offsetting not just travel at COP but all of the COP President's travel ahead of COP as well. We are very aware of that.

On transport at COP itself, we are looking very carefully at low-emission vehicles and how we can use them to move leaders and other delegates around. We are exploring hydrogen buses. It is not just showcasing in the green zone and the blue zone. We want to showcase across the city of Glasgow in the transport we are using for delegates.

Q120 **Huw Merriman:** Coming back to the showcasing point, UK manufacturers and exporters have a huge amount to offer. Our Select Committee has gone to see a hydrogen train, which has been retrofitted. Can you give us a little more flavour as to what the expo side of things will look like for our manufacturers and what you expect will result in terms of transport exports as a result of our hosting the conference?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, I cannot set out for you the precise impact of our hosting the various technologies as part of the green zone. I can only hope that it will have a positive impact on the basis that the world will be coming to Glasgow.

Ros, this might be the point at which you want to say a little more about the green zone and how we are going about the process of sifting through the very many applications that we have had to display in the green zone.

Ros Eales: We opened an expressions of interest process. That is for any organisation or individual—anyone from business, academia, civil society, you name it—to come forward with proposals for anything that they would want to showcase at COP, talks they want to put on, events they want to run. We have had a very good response. Within the responses we have had, there will be a good proportion from business, and certainly we will be looking out for the transport options.

I should say that it is not just in the green zone that we have an opportunity for showcasing. We have the UK pavilion, which is in the blue zone, and we will be looking very carefully there at our programme and how we are involving business and what we can do to showcase them.

Q121 **Huw Merriman:** Thanks, Ros. Hopefully, we will all have a chance to come up and see it for ourselves.

It is important, obviously, for us not just to talk all of this but to walk it as well. The decarbonising transport plan was due at the end of last year and we still have not had any sight of it. What discussions, Mr President



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Designate, are you having with Government colleagues to ensure that we deliver all that we are supposed to deliver so that we set a good example to others?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, ensuring that we are delivering on the 10-point plan is part of the discussions that we have as part of the implementation committee. With reference to the transport decarbonisation plan, my understanding is that will be published in the spring, shortly I hope.

Huw Merriman: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much, Huw. Our final questions are from the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, Neil Parish. Welcome.

Q122 **Neil Parish:** Thank you, Philip, for organising this and thank you, Mr President Designate, for being here with us this morning to discuss it.

A bit like Transport, DEFRA has very much a practical role in reducing emissions and improving climate change and biodiversity. How does delaying the creation of the Office for Environmental Protection, the OEP, affect our international credibility? When do you see the Environment Bill getting assent so that we can get on with this? The idea of the Office for Environmental Protection is to watch what is going on. Some 70% of our land is in private hands, and we need practical ways of improving our environment, so what is your view on when the Environment Bill is coming in and when will we have the OEP there to protect us?

Alok Sharma: Certainly in the discussions I have had with other Government Ministers around the world, our international counterparts, I have not had anyone raise the issue of the OEP, but obviously, as you say, it will formally commence once we have Royal Assent for the Environment Bill. I think you may have raised this with the DEFRA Secretary of State. The understanding is that this Bill will probably get Royal Assent in the autumn.

You raised a very important point about the work of DEFRA and how we are approaching all of this internationally. Lord Goldsmith, who is our nature champion, is a Minister in both the FCDO and DEFRA. He is doing great work in this area. He has been working very hard on campaigns like the Leaders' Pledge for Nature.

Internationally, we have a climate track as part of the G7, which is something that the DEFRA Secretary of State and I work on together, along with international counterparts. DEFRA is doing a lot of work, but specifically in relation to the OEP, that is not something that has been raised with me in my bilateral discussions.

Q123 **Neil Parish:** Thank you very much for that answer. You have led me on to my next question quite neatly. As we drive, for instance, to lower emissions, we are looking at the amount of livestock production in this country and we have great grasslands that hold carbon, so we have to balance the two. What I would ask you to do is also to take an



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international view that, as we reduce our emissions in this country, we do not import food from areas that may have been deforested: proteins that have been grown in parts of Brazil, or some of the palm oil in Malaysia. We have to be careful. We do not want to be beating our chests and saying how wonderfully green we are and what a wonderful job we have done, only to be exporting our carbon and using other people's water and other resources to grow crops that we could grow ourselves.

Alok Sharma: Yes, that is a very important point. We, of course, also have a sustainable land dialogue in which we involve other partners. Yes, I can only agree with you. Ensuring that we have action on these issues internationally is vital.

Q124 **Neil Parish:** The final question is one that the President probably cannot get involved with. I have tried to table an amendment to the Environment Bill that links large, national companies, both banks and international accountancy companies, that might be in Brazil or Malaysia, countries that are deforesting and growing crops on that land and destroying the environment. I do not know to what degree you can have any influence on that, Mr President Designate.

Alok Sharma: I will make sure that the Secretary of State for EFRA, if he is not already watching this Committee, is informed of your views.

Neil Parish: Thank you very much.

Q125 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Neil. Just before I close the session, I have a couple of final questions, Mr President Designate.

The UK is co-hosting this conference with Italy. We have had no mention during this session thus far of the role that Italy is playing. Could you, or one of your colleagues, make that clear to this Committee?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, we have had a change of Government in Italy but we have been working very closely with them. They will have the pre-COP, the Youth COP, and we are working with them on that. I don't know, Peter, if you want to elaborate on the official-level discussions that have been taking place with our Italian friends.

Peter Hill: I will say something very briefly. We are preparing in partnership with them. We have a joint working group covering G7, G20 and COP26. I would just mention the G20 and the G7 link. We are working closely with the Italians on the shared agenda between climate at the G7 and climate at the G20. Yes, changes of Government notwithstanding, we have a very close working relationship with Italy on some fairly practical questions about how we are running the sequence of summits building up to COP26.

Q126 **Chair:** They will be hosting a summit for the youth ahead of November, is that correct?

Alok Sharma: Yes.

Q127 **Chair:** Will there be opportunities for international delegates from the



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UK—for example, young people from the UK—to go to Italy if travel is permitted?

Alok Sharma: Peter, you might want to come in, but as I understand it, we are also ensuring that two delegates from each of the parties, each of the countries, who are able to go, will go, and I think we are covering costs. Is that right, Peter?

Peter Hill: Yes. The Italians have set up a working group on this event, and we are part of that working group. Yes, we certainly expect that there will be representation at their Youth COP event, which will then feed into the COP itself in ways that we are working with them on.

Q128 **Chair:** We are also clear from your remarks yesterday that the delegation from the UK has not yet been settled. What can you tell us about what you expect the delegation to include?

Alok Sharma: As you said, we have not yet settled on that, but I can assure you that as soon as we have, I will inform the House.

Q129 **Chair:** You have very broad shoulders. You have a global role to play here. You also have some ministerial support from the Minister for Energy and, I believe, the Minister for Asia-Pacific, Anne-Marie Trevelyan and Lord Goldsmith. Neither of them has been mentioned in this session. What are they doing to help you?

Alok Sharma: Forgive me, I think I may have mentioned them. Anne-Marie is the Energy Minister, but she is also our adaptation and resilience champion. She is doing a lot of international engagement on that issue. Zac Goldsmith, as I mentioned, is leading on the nature track. He is doing a lot of engagement as well. I feel well supported by both of them. We also have Andrew Griffith, who is the UK net-zero business champion. He is engaging with UK businesses, ensuring that they sign up to going to net zero.

Q130 **Chair:** Are you using the trade envoys that have been appointed to many of the countries that will be attending the delegation?

Alok Sharma: I have conversations with parliamentary colleagues through APPGs and bilaterally. Before I go on country visits, I make sure that I speak to colleagues across Government Departments, including in DIT.

Q131 **Chair:** You have been very helpful in agreeing to have this session as the precursor to a number of sessions. You have kindly responded to our letter. I think the Scottish Affairs Committee, which is next on our schedule for meetings, has invited you to attend a meeting in April. Could you confirm to this group of Select Committees whether you are content with the schedule that we set out? We are not expecting you to attend every session in person. Perhaps some of the other ministerial colleagues you have mentioned, and other officials, will be prepared to attend. Can you give us your view on what we have proposed?



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Alok Sharma: Thank you very much, Chair. Yes, I completely understand why there is so much interest in this. I completely understand also that you are all very keen that we get this right. It is important for the UK and, of course, very much for the world. As you said, as part of my work, I am going to have to do, am doing, a lot of international engagements and travel, so I think it will be very useful if, as happens, frankly, in other Departments, other Ministers and officials are also able to attend some of these Select Committee hearings. I will not be able to take part in every single one of them, but I will commit to doing as many as I possibly can. Let's say we will talk to each of the individual Committees and see what is the best fit in terms of who should be going in front of them, whether it is me, other Ministers, or officials.

Q132 **Chair:** That is very helpful. Thank you. My final plea is on behalf of Parliament as a whole. Mr Speaker is seeking to collate views from across Parliament as to who should be able either to form part of the delegation or attend other events around the green zone or blue zone. Could you give us any insight into what role you see, or perhaps Peter sees, that UK parliamentarians can play in helping to deliver a successful COP26?

Alok Sharma: We have had this discussion with APPGs and other Select Committees. I am very keen that, where colleagues have connections with international counterparts, they should be talking to them. We should be talking about our four core objectives in delivering COP26. I am very keen that that work takes place. I am also on record as having said that I hope we can ensure that some of this year's autumn recess coincides with the dates of COP so parliamentarians are able to come up.

Peter, is there anything else that you wanted to add?

Peter Hill: No, not at this stage. I think you have covered it.

Q133 **Chair:** I would just press you about the role for Select Committees. Everyone will be special pleading that they have a particular role to play here, but we have made some suggestions, collectively, to Mr Speaker that he should put forward some events for visiting parliamentarians, which we in various guises would be able to host. Do you envisage that as something that you would look to find space for?

Alok Sharma: I have not seen what has been proposed, but I have been pretty clear that we want this to be an inclusive COP. There will, of course, be limitations on what is and is not possible, but I want this to be inclusive so, of course, I will have a look at whatever proposals are put forward and see how we can work with them.

Chair: We will be writing to you with a few follow-up questions—there are not a lot, but we will be writing to you with a few more—and we will give you a copy of the proposal that was made.

I would like to conclude this session by thanking, first of all, our witnesses, Alok Sharma, the President Designate of COP26, Peter Hill, Ros Eales and Dr John Murton, and members of the Environmental Audit



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Committee for attending, many of them having had to hold their tongues because we had so many guests today. I would particularly like to thank our guests, Sir Bernard Jenkin from the Liaison Committee, Darren Jones from the BEIS Committee, Stewart McDonald from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Chris Law from the International Development Committee, Anthony Browne from the Treasury Committee, Greg Clark, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, Andrew Bowie from the Scottish Affairs Committee, Huw Merriman, Chair of the Transport Committee, and Neil Parish, the irrepressible Chair of the EFRA Committee. I also thank Martyn Atkins, our Clerk who put together the brief for this meeting at short notice and organised the logistics, which for the first meeting of 10 Select Committees altogether, remotely using technology, has been, I hope you will agree, a very worthwhile exercise. We are very grateful to you indeed, Mr President Designate, for your time this morning and look forward to you and your colleagues attending other such meetings in the months to come.