HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Corrected oral evidence: Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Tuesday 10 March 2020

9.55 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Krebs (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; The Earl of Caithness; Lord Empey; Baroness Janke; Baroness Osamor; Baroness Parminter; Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick; Baroness Sanderson of Welton; Lord Whitty.

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Witness

I: Henry Dimbleby, National Food Strategy.

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Examination of witness

Henry Dimbleby.

Q100 **The Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee inquiry into food, poverty, health and the environment. Henry, we are very grateful to you for coming to join us today. Those who are sitting observing have a list of interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. The meeting is being broadcast live on the parliamentary website. A transcript will be taken and published on the Committee website, but you will have a chance to make corrections before it is finalised and published.

We are going to spend the next hour or so finding out about your review of the national food strategy. To begin with, Henry, could you introduce yourself for the record?

Henry Dimbleby: I co-founded the Leon restaurant chain. In 2013, I did some work for the Government on a school food plan, which resulted in the introduction of universal free school meals, compulsory cooking on the curriculum for all children up to the age of 14 and various other actions. Coming out of that, I set up a charity called Chefs in Schools, which started last year. We retrain professional chefs to change career and become chefs in schools and do cookery in schools. We have trained up 25 schools so far, which is more than we thought. As regards other potential conflicts, there are two food businesses other than Leon in which I hold a stake. One is London Union, which runs street food markets in the UK. Another is Rockfish, which is a seafood business in the south-west.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We very much appreciate your taking the time to come and talk to us. I know that you have been very busy preparing the interim report of your national food strategy, and we will come back to the timing of that later.

May I kick off with a general question? We have heard a lot about food systems. Can you tell us what you think the food system is?

Henry Dimbleby: I can, and perhaps I could talk about how it is relevant to the work that we are doing. People mean a lot of things when they talk about the food system. For me, the first important aspect of our food system is its complexity. Outcomes for health, sustenance and the environment are interlinked in a very complicated way, with many players acting independently, largely under the action of Adam Smith's invisible hand, but also with significant regulation—it is probably one of our most regulated sectors—to produce those outcomes.

The other thing about the food system is that it is almost impossible to act on it in any way without creating winners and losers. One thing, for me, exemplifies what it means for the food system to be a system. It is the problem of meat. In that one-word problem, you have something that encapsulates all the complexities of the system. As far as outcomes are concerned, in our health, meat is responsible for the provision of B12 and

other nutrients to a large proportion of the population. It is an integral part of the livelihood of many in the countryside and is part of that culture. It creates our hallowed landscape. A lot of what we consider our landscape is the result of meat farming. It is used increasingly for rotation in the soil, to lock carbon in the soil in farming rotations. However, it is also a contributor of greenhouse gases. The land on which it is reared could be used to plant trees to sequester carbon. Too much meat eating can lead to ill health, and the effluent from meat often creates pollution.

There is a set of outcomes, good and bad, in a system that is not only economically complex but supported by very large subsidies and complex tariffs. Any action in that system would almost certainly have winners and losers. For example, if you tried to build in the cost of some of the externalities, it would put up the price of meat. It would be a regressive action, and meat would become something that was more accessible for rich people in society.

Another example of that kind of trade-off is carbon. The most carbon-efficient systems are the feedlots of the United States. By feeding a cow hormones and keeping its life as short as possible by growing it quickly, you reduce the methane emissions, but that obviously has implications for animal welfare and health. That is one example in the system where multiple outcomes and interactions create winners and losers.

The Chair: If you had to produce a definition of food system in one sentence or paragraph, what would you say?

Henry Dimbleby: The food system is a complex economic system that produces multiple outcomes and on which any action is likely to create both winners and losers.

A couple of things are relevant to that for the strategy. First, when it comes to policy, we need to change the way we think about how we create policy for complex systems. We have been talking quite a lot with Mike Kenny, who is professor of public policy at Cambridge. A view of evidence-based policy built up to a head at the end of the Blair era, when we thought that we had the end of politics, that all policy would be evidence-based and that we could move to a world without the political tussles that we experience: a kind of Nirvana of the future. The problem with systems is that you do not know for sure what the effect of any action that you take will be on a system. You can have ideas or a hypothesis, but you do not know for sure.

Take the example of the sugary drinks tax. It is, effectively, a tiny intervention in a complicated system that takes enormous political effort to bring in, and then everyone collapses exhausted once the policy has got across the line. It has done some extraordinary things. In some ways, it has been much more successful than people thought, but there are odd niggles in the way it is formulated that make it not perfect. Really, you want to change it. In fact, if you talk to any business working on complex systems, that is what they say. Paul Clarke, the CTO of Ocado, is on our

team. He thinks that the way government engages with complex systems is insane, because in any business there is trial and error all the time. With anything we do on policy, we have to try to introduce some kind of living lab, some area where we can experiment more freely, to see how actions affect the system.

The second thing is cross-government work. We are spending a lot of time on that. There are very specific ways in which government's objectives are not aligned. At the moment, Defra and Trade have very different objectives in our trade negotiations with other countries. There is a constant running battle between BEIS and Health on proper regulation of retailers and food producers. For me, those are the two issues: how do we interact with complex systems, and how do we align government so that it is more joined up?

The Chair: That is really helpful. We will come back to your views on system change shortly. You touched on it and we might expand it in a minute.

Q101 **Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick:** What have been the key themes about the current food system to arise during the consultation phase? Can you tell us about some of your key findings in that respect so far?

Henry Dimbleby: We have done a formal consultation, which has had about 2,000 responses. We have also done consultation in all sorts of informal ways. The formal consultation ran from 17 August to 25 October last year and had about 2,000 responses. About 80% of those were from individuals, 10% were from NGOs and 10% were from business. Their concerns were exactly what you would imagine; 55% were concerned about the environment, agriculture and health, 35% were concerned about food security and the others raised a number of smaller issues.

We are still analysing the specific responses, which we will publish with part one of our report. I will talk later about the outcomes in the system, the findings of our own research and how we see the system. In general, a number of themes are coming through from the population.

First, it is an issue that 10 years ago was seen as slightly niche by a lot of people. Now the harm that the food system is doing to health and the environment, particularly to the health of those who are less affluent, is recognised as one of the big problems of society. That is clear not only from our consultation; in Canada, America, Germany, France, Italy and the Scandinavian countries, everyone now realises that it is a big and growing problem.

The second thing that we see quite strongly, which is probably interesting to this group, is to do with values. We have not only had consultations, we have held dialogues in Grimsby, the north-east, Cumbria, the south-west, the south-east and East Anglia with citizens selected to represent the country demographically. The idea of food sovereignty and our being a food-growing nation is very strong. If you talk to people about potential interventions on health by the Government, such as having more taxes

such as the sugar tax or plain wrappers on sweets, you get vigorous discussions. The one thing that everyone seems to share is the idea that they want their food to be nearby. I guess it is evolutionary. Except maybe with economists, even if you explain that it is important for our food security to be a trading nation, because it protects us from bad harvests, it is hard to get that idea across. There is a very strong sense of us as a food-growing nation, even among people in Grimsby, Lewisham and the centre of towns.

Lord Empey: We heard earlier that we are the processed food-consuming capital of Europe. Why is that?

Henry Dimbleby: We are. We eat more processed food than any other country. There are two competing theories. The first is the industrial revolution theory, which is that we were ripped from the countryside faster and sooner than anyone else. Between 1830 and 1890, we went from having something like 30% of our population living in cities to over 50%. Those figures may not be exactly right, but they are broadly right. It took France until 1950 to reach the same level.

The story goes that not only were people not close to the food that was grown, so they lost that culture, but we worked out that we were very good at making stuff and selling it to the rest of the world, so we could afford to buy our food from other people and we severed our food culture. Before the Second World War, we produced only 30% of our own food. As you know, we now produce 60%. According to that logic, we severed that culture quite early and food became something to feed us to pursue our industrial ambitions. That is one story.

The other story is about the Anglo-Saxon approach to free trade. There is an extraordinary situation as regards the weight of the population. Basically, since the Second World War, as food supply increased, thanks to Norman Borlaug and the green revolution, weights increased globally. The obesity epidemic that we see now is something that has been building for a long time.

In the 1960s and 1970s another thing happened, which was that the way we interact with the world changed completely. We went from interacting with the world through muscle power to doing it through machines. That led to a massive reduction in the number of calories that we used and the amount of activity that we did. There is some dispute about that, but I think it is undeniable. The IFS has done a fantastic study pointing out that, if a miner transferred to a desk job, they would have to run for 10 hours a week in their free time to burn the same number of calories that would be required for a miner.

As we were going through that transition, which was a fundamental human transition, and not a bad one, because a life of hard labour is generally short and brutish, we needed a transition of the food system that reflected that change. We needed to change completely the way we ate, because we were changing completely what we did with our bodies. Actually, that was when the food companies began to get creative about

marketing and selling us the foods that the green revolution had made very cheap: refined carbohydrate, refined sugar and refined oil. Therefore, we had the exact opposite of what we required. That is the second story. It is about our Anglo-Saxon approach to markets, our delegation and the fact that we are happy to let companies do more and be freer with their actions. That is a very long answer to a very short question. It is impossible to tell which of those two things is the case.

The Chair: We could debate that for a long time. It is very interesting.

Q102 **Baroness Osamor:** From the evidence you have gathered so far, which areas of our food system require the most urgent attention? What are your views on system change?

Henry Dimbleby: The three areas I mentioned before—broadly, health, food security and the environment—require some dramatic change. Food security may require dramatic thinking, not change. I do not know yet, as we have not quite got there. They require different actions.

On health, to be clear about the scale of the problem, in 2017, the last time it was measured, 90,000 people died 14 years early and 300,000 years were lost to ill health. That is not just 14 years early for those people, but for their partners, parents, siblings, friends and carers. The economic impact of that is £54 billion in one year. The total GVA of the food system is £121 billion. It is not just a problem for the less affluent, although it is particularly strong there; 20% of every demographic, even the richest, are obese. It is a massive issue. Health is the area where at the moment I wake up most in the middle of the night thinking about how intertwined the issues are and how difficult it is going to be to create change. I will come on to the systems side of that a bit more in a second.

Although the environment is just as severe a problem, I am more hopeful. The indicator species for the environment are birds in the countryside. We have lost half of our farmland birds. We have fewer farmland birds than anywhere in Europe. That is an indicator of biodiversity in general. We have lost 99% of our wildflower meadows, half our woodland and three-quarters of our ponds. The effect of farming on our countryside is hard to exaggerate, but, first, nature comes back quickly and, secondly, we have been spending £3.5 billion of subsidies not on trying to resolve public goods. I am much more hopeful that, if we get the environmental land management scheme right, a whole swathe of policy is about to come in that will fix that area.

Food security is interesting. As I said, it is a combination of emotion and economics. What an economist might tell us was adequate food security might not be what we were comfortable with as a country. We have looked at U-boat food security and at what happens if you sever all links to the UK. How long could we survive? The answer is that, with the calories on this island and with rationing, we could probably get through to the next harvest, by which time we would probably be able to tear up enough fields to plant enough food to get us by. We would probably not starve, even in that situation, but it is probably not a situation anyone

would be comfortable with. It is certainly not a situation where a political party would remain in power if it was deemed to have created it.

For me, the question on food security is, where between that and making sure that everyone has an avocado on Christmas Day is the Government's responsibility? The world is going to be increasingly affected by climate change and will have much more volatile geopolitics than we are used to. We live in a kind of bubble of thinking that we have the stable geopolitics that we have had since 1950, but we cannot take that for granted. What level of food security should be the Government's responsibility, and how should they ensure it?

On your systems point briefly, I do not believe that the Government alone can solve the issues. If they create policies, that does not create action. I have seen that directly with cooking on the curriculum. It is now compulsory in the curriculum to teach children up to the age of 14 to cook. With the charity I am involved in, I go to schools all the time, and it is not happening. The Government cannot mandate. Not only do you need government action, it needs to be backed up by a belief among business and citizens that they need to change, too. I see our job not only as being to advise the Government what the big levers to pull are and to give them the political space to be able to pull them, but as being to try to get alignment in the private sector and among NGOs. It is a huge transformational job, but we have done it before. We thought that we were going to starve after the war, but we got over that. If we set a different set of objectives, I am confident we can do it, but it will take effort from everyone to make that change.

The Chair: Can I ask you to expand on that a little? You had the three pillars of health, the environment and food security, but at the end you slipped in a fourth pillar, which is choice, when you mentioned the avocado on Christmas Day. According to the analysis you have done, we could get by, but people would be eating a lot of turnips, swedes and potatoes, and fewer tomatoes, lettuces, avocados and citrus fruit—the things we have all got used to. You said that, in your consultations with people, food security in the sense of growing it ourselves, rather than getting enough to eat, was a high priority. How did people trade that off against the reality of their lives? They expect to go to the supermarket and find oranges, lettuces and tomatoes every day of the year.

Henry Dimbleby: There are two things. The terms of reference mention the current system. The current system does extraordinary things. It provides sustenance, pleasure, and an abundance of food and fresh vegetables that would have been unimaginable to previous generations. It also provides one in seven of our jobs. Looking at the trade-offs, I do not think that you have done a good job if you address health, the environment and food security, and then destroy pleasure, jobs, et cetera. You would have to go back in the other direction.

We are going back for a second session in Grimsby and Cumbria with the people we talked to the first time. At the moment, we are trying to work out how you talk about the trade-offs. If you say to someone, "Do you

want food that, when you buy it, is good for your health and good for the environment?", they say yes. Everyone will say yes, but we know that when people are in front of the supermarket shelf a lot of them shop on price, unsurprisingly. We are trying to determine a way of having conversations that put some of those trade-offs in very specific ways.

For example, when we talk about standards of imports—chlorinated chicken—we will show people what the specific items of food would cost if you removed all our tariffs, versus what they cost now, and get them to talk about how big a difference there is. Some things, such as beef, will actually be more expensive. American beef is more expensive than UK beef at the moment. We want to have discussions down to the specifics of the number of pence it adds to certain things, because the UK customer is more value-focused than customers in Europe and spends less of their household income on food. Therefore, the starting point has to be price and all the trade-offs have to be linked in some way to that. If you are going to choose a focus, that is the focus you have to build around, unfortunately.

The Chair: I have one more question about the discussions that you have had in Grimsby, Cumbria, the south-west and the south-east. You said that it was a sample that matched the population. As you know, our inquiry is focused very much on poverty, which is one of your themes as well. Within the groups of people you have had discussions with, have you been able to segment the response of people who are living at the edge, in the bottom decile of household income, and whether their responses differ from those of other people in the population?

Henry Dimbleby: At the sessions, we do not know who they are, but they self-identify. They say, "I've really struggled", "I've been to a food bank", or, "I've done this", so you get a sense of their issues. For that reason, we have two citizens on our advisory panel who have struggled to get food on the table, and they are brilliant. When the CEOs and everyone else are talking at one level, they say, "Hold on. That's not what it is like on the ground". They definitely have a different experience from most people. They see food in a different way.

The interesting thing was that, although each group was representative not of the area, but of the population as a whole, when we were in a more disadvantaged area, such as Grimsby or the north-east, the conversation was much more about price and the quality of jobs. Why am I in a bad-quality job? Why does my employer in the food business treat me like this? The health issues were secondary to those, and the environment issues were tertiary to those. There is something interesting about how people feel in their community. Wherever people sit in their community, they begin to absorb the values of the community in general, which is quite an interesting thing.

Q103 **The Earl of Caithness:** Henry, I want to take you a bit more down the road of consultation, but to change the focus from the public to the Government and industry. Starting with the Government, can you tell us a little more about what your relationships have been with Defra,

particularly now that you are on the third Secretary of State during your inquiry, and about whether other departments get that there is a monumental problem?

Henry Dimbleby: When I was asked to do this by Michael Gove, one of the things we discussed was the fact that they might not be in government, and he would almost certainly not be Secretary of State, given the tenure of these things. We talked about how we could set it up so that it was cross-party, because it is a national thing, and cross-government. I then spoke to other people who had done reviews in the past. Ed Balls, who had done a lot, was particularly helpful about how you set them up so that it is not just a report that gathers dust and then sits on a shelf. The way we set it up is thanks to the input of people on both sides.

Within government, we have strong buy-in from Health. Matt Hancock, whom I have met, is a strong supporter. I have not met Alok Sharma yet, because he is quite busy with COP and has only just started. Gove is going to set up a secretariat in the Cabinet Office to make sure that all the government departments are properly consulted and brought with us.

At the level below that, we have a working group of DGs, with whom we share all the ongoing work; pre-publication, everything is being shared with them. We have that for DHSC, BEIS, Education, the Treasury, Trade, the DWP, DfID and the Cabinet Office. We have added the FSA and PHE to that group. At Civil Service level, all those groups will see the work and get an opportunity for input before we publish it.

We have pretty strong ongoing relationships. On trade, we are talking to people from the Cabinet Office and Defra. On health, we are regularly in consultation with PHE, the NHS and so forth. We are trying to create a pretty strong alliance. That is how we are trying to do it within government.

We are trying to ensure that politicians from all sides are engaged in it. We are just waiting to see where Labour settles. Prior to this disruption, we had met pretty much all the opposite numbers of those people, to ensure that they knew what we were doing as well. As I said, it should not be a party political thing. It should be something that is a national endeavour.

The Earl of Caithness: Looking ahead, I was interested by what you said about Michael Gove. When we were on the NERC Committee, we recommended that rural proofing should be in the Cabinet Office. Michael Gove heartily rejected that, and now it looks as though he wants to do something in the Cabinet Office, which is good.

Do you see something like what has been arranged with rural proofing working for this? In the case of rural proofing it is Defra making certain that every other department is working in the same system. Do you see it as being more for the Cabinet Office?

Henry Dimbleby: This goes back to Baroness Osamor's question. The answer is that I do not know what the structure is, but what is clear is that if you speak, as we have, to the people who wrote the food review 10 years ago, and the one before that, they all say, "We were discouraged from creating structural change because it is complicated and difficult". With a review such as that, there is a big burst of energy and then all the departments go off and do their own thing again.

It is clear to me that we need some structure to ensure ongoing co-operation, but whether that is a law, a department, an ALB or a set of targets that the Government have to put together, I do not know yet. It is clear that we need something. If it just remained in Defra, the energy would dissipate very quickly.

Obviously, the Mark Sedwill fusion framework is the direction of travel for the Government, which is encouraging. It is a recognition that there are many areas you cannot deal with in one government department and you create problems if you do.

The Earl of Caithness: Moving on to industry, can you tell us something about your discussions and how keen the manufacturers and retailers have been to get involved? Last week, we met the retailers. They were pretty opaque at the best of times: they have done a wonderful job and it is the fault of everybody else. What has been your experience of your discussions?

Henry Dimbleby: Did you meet the CEOs or did you meet the federations?

The Earl of Caithness: We met one federation and one director.

The Chair: We met Judith Batchelar from Sainsbury's and Andrew Opie from the BRC.

Henry Dimbleby: First of all, I think that most of the industry now realises the problem. For example, Justin King, the ex-CEO of Sainsbury's, has said on the record very clearly that he thinks that in the past the food industry had not realised what a big issue it was for them.

The federations are very different from the CEOs. Structurally, it is a very difficult space for them because their job is to protect the industry, and there are questions of nuance and where they could move. Effectively, every time they come here they think they are in a negotiation, so they would be worried that if they said something that they had not been allowed to say it might get them into trouble.

While I admire people who work in the federations, I feel some sympathy for the way they are restricted in talking about this. The CEOs, on the other hand, I have found very engaged. On my advisory panel we have a CEO from all the major sectors. There is an interesting spread in how impacted they are. On one side are businesses that make their money by selling food to people who want to eat healthily, and they can just go out and make money and not feel too worried. The people who buy from

them want to protect the environment and want to eat healthily, so everything is aligned.

At the other end, the way some people market certain products is inaccurate and borderline immoral. They are people who are taking unhealthy things and marketing them as healthy. We are going to talk quite strongly about that in part one. If industry is asking to be involved in the process of change and it is not regulation, it has to be self-regulation, and those kinds of things do not generate trust. They are small in number but not insignificant. They are a sign that the message has not come down from the boards, from the leadership of the companies, that certain behaviours are not acceptable.

In the middle are people such as Roger Whiteside, the CEO of Greggs. He is the CEO of a baker's business that sells more sausage rolls than anyone else in the country. If you eat too many sausage rolls and doughnuts, it is not particularly good for you. He has done vegan sausage rolls and is trying to do a lot on the environment, but if he were to say, as his business model, "I am just going to serve salads", he would go bust tomorrow. He is very thoughtful about that. He has done a lot. He has taken out more sugar than almost anyone else. He has put salads in every store, even if they do not sell and make a loss.

If we come back to the systems thing and how we change the environment, Greggs is a good example of thinking, "How do we really change the system?" The majority of people in business are like Roger and are not like the others, but there needs to be a cultural shift.

The Earl of Caithness: What about local authorities and LEPs? Have you discussed things with them?

Henry Dimbleby: They are a massive part of the implementation, particularly with the movement of public health money. We have engaged with them individually at the moment. We have run sessions with Birmingham and Manchester, but we know we need to do that systematically as we go through to part two because they are a big part of the implementation.

Baroness Boycott: To some degree, the Earl of Caithness has asked the questions that I was going to ask, but I would like to ask a follow-up. Are you going to look at the whole world of food advertising, with the knowledge that 98% of it is about unhealthy food? I know that because we are involved in it with ITV. They are putting in the fact that they screen VegPower for free as part of the reason why they should not have a nine o'clock watershed. It is a great Catch 22 place to be. Are you going to tackle that?

Henry Dimbleby: Yes.

Baroness Boycott: What are you going to suggest?

Henry Dimbleby: I do not know what the recommendation is going to be. When I became the lead non-exec at Defra, one of the first meetings

I had was with ITV executives who were making the case that if you restricted marketing to children you would just drive it elsewhere; you would drive it online and you would stop the production of children's programmes and the world would end. I was not completely convinced that that was the case, but there are things you might be able to do if you are trying to get positive messages out.

VegPower is amazing. When I was told that it was happening I thought, "Oh my God, this is going to be a disaster. We are going to have advertising for vegetables, and it is going to show everyone that vegetables are for losers". Actually it made you realise how surrounded your children are by advertising for rubbish. All the kids were excited by it. My son was talking about it last night at the table; he just brought it up. He said, "Do you remember that bit where—?"

Could you link money in some way to adverts so that you could advertise more of the good stuff? Could you force people to advertise good stuff? There are all sorts of ways in which you might change advertising. We need to get creative. It is a huge amount of money, so we need to think carefully about that.

Baroness Boycott: Can that happen under voluntary measures rather than restricted measures?

Henry Dimbleby: It has not yet.

Lord Empey: You made a point about federations and retailers that I think we had figured out ourselves.

Henry Dimbleby: It is not a world-changing observation, but it is worth saying.

Lord Empey: Have you had any interaction with the territorial departments?

Henry Dimbleby: With the devolved Assemblies?

Lord Empey: Yes.

Henry Dimbleby: Yes, I have. Food as a whole is largely devolved, but there are areas that are not. We have set up another group. There are people in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, all of whom are leading food strategies, similar things to us, and we have set up a group where we share experience.

There are three kinds of thing. One is the stuff that is not devolved, trade for example, where anything that we recommend will, if it is implemented, be imposed upon them. That requires deep understanding of their issues.

The second thing is stuff that is devolved but does not make sense to do differently—for example, farm regulation. There are over 200 farms that sit on both sides of the Welsh border. For them to have completely

different regulatory regimes on one farm would be a form of insanity. We are lightly comparing notes on that.

The third thing is stuff such as education, where there could be very different outcomes but we might learn things from each other. That is how we are structuring it.

Lord Whitty: I have two points. You talked about the CEOs and the federations and so forth, but in the interface with people buying predominantly unhealthy food, it is not the big retailers or even the big caterers; it is relatively small outlets, some of which are chains or franchises. Getting into that area is important. What feedback have you had from the fast-food area yourself?

My second point is about the Government. You talked about co-ordination. The big thing that is going to happen in the next couple of years is on trade. You did not mention the Department for International Trade. I talked to people from the FSA recently and there are very few links between the regulatory approach of the FSA for food here and the international negotiations that are about to commence. Have you found that, or was it just an inadvertent omission in the list of departments involved?

Henry Dimbleby: On the first of those two things, we have not done enough with fast food, although you could argue that Greggs is a form of fast food. Shortly, I am meeting Paul Pomroy, CEO of McDonald's. I think at McDonald's they are in a similar place to Roger Whiteside. Their structure is in a very difficult place. When we were working on school food, all the supermarkets used to say, "You have to look at the out of home" and I used to think it was a diversionary tactic, but I do not think that is the case any more. There is now good evidence that, if supermarkets reduce salt in their pizzas, people just go and buy their pizzas from Dominos. We are eating so many calories out of home that I think you have to consider the whole piece.

I may have missed out International Trade, but it is one of the departments in our cross-Whitehall group. At the moment, there seems to be a difference of opinion at the heart of government, or at least an opinion has not yet been expressed, on trade and the extent to which Britain taking back control meant taking back control of sovereignty and democracy or, on the other hand, the extent to which it meant becoming a global trading power.

From the discussions we have had around the country, the sense I get is that citizens feel pretty strongly about standards. They feel that one of the outcomes of Brexit is that we can control our standards. I do not get the sense that they feel that Brexit was primarily about being able to strike trade deals in which we would lower our standards. We are going to be talking about that in part one of our report.

The Chair: One of the questions I put last week to Judith Batchelar was, if as a result of trade deals we had different standards for imported food

and home-produced food, would Sainsbury's sell the lower standard food alongside the higher standard food? After a lot of pressing, I think she said, "No, we wouldn't". That is quite an important angle. Would the retailers have shelves for poor people with lower standard food and shelves for rich people with higher standard food?

Henry Dimbleby: It is interesting. Currently, for example, you can buy very cheap beef from Botswana. You can argue about whether it is a lower standard. Because of the dry conditions it has a longer shelf life, et cetera, but nevertheless you can get cheap beef from Botswana. It is not sold in the supermarkets. It is sold to restaurants.

Justin King, who is on the advisory panel, said that it is very hard to get complicated messages on a packet. People have a lot going on when they shop, so price is pretty dominant in what they shop for. But "British" is something that cuts through, so buying British meat in the supermarket is important to most of the population. That is why, when you go to supermarkets now, you see predominantly British meat. There is definitely a chance on a number of things. I would be very surprised, for example, if they let in chlorinated chicken or if you saw American chicken in supermarkets.

The Chair: But it might be in the fast food sector or catered sector.

Henry Dimbleby: It might, but, looking at the numbers, it is only about 5% cheaper on a wholesale level anyway.

Baroness Boycott: But could it end up in the ready meals we eat?

Henry Dimbleby: Yes. It would end up in foods. That is a good question about ready meals in the supermarket; whether they are British, I do not know.

Q104 **Baroness Parminter:** What are the anticipated timelines for both the interim report and the final report? You talked a bit about what you are doing with Michael Gove to get buy-in cross-department in advance. What do you want to see as the next steps once it is published?

Henry Dimbleby: It is dependent on coronavirus because I think it is quite possible that we will go into lockdown in the next three weeks. Assuming that we are all able to carry on our business, we hope to get part one out in May, and that will be diagnosis and vision. It will set out the economics, power dynamics and genetics that create the outcomes, good and bad, from the system we see today. It will try to create a common starting point of where we are and a vision of where we might want to get to.

We then have a detailed set of engagements with citizens and business, culminating in a citizens' assembly that we are running in the autumn. That will focus on a lot of the issues around the role of the state in telling me or helping me to eat a better diet; where we can give government the freedom to change things; and where citizens might not find those kinds of interactions acceptable. We plan to publish part two, which will be a

strategic plan, a set of actions for government and for business, in the new year.

As regards what I would like to see from this, at the highest level it would be a world in which my children's children can buy and eat their food in an environment where it is easier to eat healthy and environmentally sustainable food than not. That is a massive shift and will require changes, as I said, across the system.

The Government have already said that they will respond to the report with a White Paper six months after it is published. They have asked me to come back to review progress another 12 months after that. The ambition for what we recommend is to try to get as much embedded as agreed action on publication. With the school food plan, which I understand is a much smaller sphere of operation, all the actions in it except for one were agreed on publication. The more we can see ourselves marching alongside citizens, government and business to create a better future and put a plan in place, rather than just delivering suggestions to government, the better our chances of getting change in the system.

Baroness Boycott: What can we do, or what would you like to see our report do, that would support your work? We all have the same aim in mind, and we will come out after your initial date of publication.

Henry Dimbleby: When are you coming out?

Baroness Boycott: Probably in July or June.

The Chair: We will finish the report at the end of June and it will probably be published in early July. We are sandwiched between your first stage report and your final report.

Henry Dimbleby: The biggest thing at this stage is where the system is today. One of the things I did not say about complex systems is that another feature of them is that people who debate over them tend to be selective about the evidence they pick, and fight battles over things that we should not be fighting battles over.

If, together, we can create a real sense of how big the problems are and what is causing them in health and the environment when it comes to meat, that will be a massive job. When those fights are happening, and when people are hiding behind phony or small evidence because change is hard or difficult, those places are taken away. I think together that is what we can achieve.

We are designing the interim report. It is not just going to be a report; there is going to be an online interactive database with all the data, and we are making a film. We are trying to make it something where, if you are in a half argument or a false argument, you can say, "Go and read about it there". We short-circuit the noise and we can get on with the business of thinking about how we change the system to get to a better place.

Baroness Boycott: How do you describe cheap food these days? It always strikes me as a very complicated expression.

Henry Dimbleby: I hate the question.

Baroness Boycott: I know, but it gets used so much.

Henry Dimbleby: Whether food is cheap or expensive is a meaningless question. The question is, what is the true cost of food? That is one question.

Baroness Boycott: And can you persuade people to pay a bit more?

Henry Dimbleby: And can people afford to buy it? If people cannot afford to pay the full cost of food, you have a society that is not working. Harms to the environment and health are not a sustainable, long-term way of tackling the problem of poverty.

Baroness Boycott: Who is going to pick up the bill?

Henry Dimbleby: One of the things the Government should do is this. At the moment, if you ask what is the true cost of food, you can go to a few different NGO reports—

Baroness Boycott: Like true cost accounting.

Henry Dimbleby: Yes. It is anything from 50% more to just a bit more to twice as much, depending on the agenda of the person who has done the report. One of the things that the Government should be doing is calculating that cost. I speak to people all the time in supermarkets who say, "I want to do X, Y and Z, but I can't because I am being out-competed".

Baroness Boycott: Given that the processed food system—call it what you will—has been empowered across the world by government subsidies of the key ingredients, do you think that in the end we have to flip that on its head? In order to make good, sustainable food affordable to everybody, does a different subsidy system have to come in or is it all going to be about increasing wages? There seems to be a point that I never quite get about how you solve that problem. In your evidence, you point out the thing about 1,000 calories costing you £2 if you are buying doughnuts.

Henry Dimbleby: On the environmental side, you can clearly change the subsidy, as I said.

Baroness Boycott: You think that is possible.

Henry Dimbleby: On the environmental side, yes. At the moment you are just subsidising practices.

Baroness Boycott: Would you subsidise horticulture?

Henry Dimbleby: If you look at the total environmental subsidy of £3.4 billion, that is £50 per household, but if you put all your subsidies into veg I do not think you are going to get people eating more veg. I do not think that is going to do it. There might be areas where you can encourage it and that you could link, but I do not think putting it in at the production end is going to work.

I do not know about health; there is good evidence from the States that for the least affluent in society subsidising fruit and veg can help. In the recent evidence at the weekend on universal free school meals, it is clear that, surprise, surprise, children who eat good food have health benefits. That is a massive subsidy.

At production level I do not think that is going to hack it, but you may have to intervene. The question is whether it is subsidy or cost.

Baroness Boycott: Finally, are there any systems around the world that are brilliant or interesting that you think the Committee ought to look at?

Henry Dimbleby: The culture in Japan is very interesting. I unintentionally did a review of hospital food in Japan recently, during a couple of days' stay. I used to live in Japan and it reminded me what a country with a different food culture does automatically. The Japanese are concerned about the changes and they are doing a lot. They subsidise their farming more than anyone else. It is an interesting model.

One of the slightly depressing things about the work we have done so far is that whenever you look at one of the interventions that is being held up as the thing that is going to change everything—whether in Holland, Leeds or wherever—and you talk to the actual people, they say, "Well, the *Guardian* said it was great and then everyone came from all round the world and said it was great, but actually we haven't cracked it". That is slightly depressing, but if you see anything that works, please let me know.

Q105 **The Chair:** We are running close to the end, but I have one very brief final question. You mentioned the promise from the Government that there will be a White Paper. You have been invited to come back and do a review 12 months on. You are carefully orchestrating things so that there is buy-in from different parts of government.

We have heard two questions, and I want to put them to you. First, should there be a Minister responsible for the food strategy? Would you like to see that? Secondly, should there be some independent body—an analogue would be the climate change committee—that reports to Parliament on how the strategy is being implemented? Are either of those things on your agenda or on your radar screen?

Henry Dimbleby: When we publish part two, the ongoing part, we will definitely be thinking about those two questions. What is the structural thing? Is it a law or an equivalent of the CCC, et cetera? I do not know yet. We are looking at examples from around the world on that and in the UK.

As regards a Minister for the food strategy, I have not spoken to Alok Sharma or Liz Truss yet, but George Eustice is fantastically knowledgeable, engaged and dedicated to the cause. He knows a lot about it. We have strong support from the Cabinet Office and we have Matt Hancock at Health. Having multiple engaged Ministers is better than having just one. I am happy with the situation that we have at the moment, but post-publication I think there will be some need for structural change.

The Chair: I suppose my retort to that would be that you might be lucky with those three individuals because they have all bought in. Play the tape forward a year and none of those individuals is in the job, and you have a different set of Ministers who are not engaged. Does one need to have somebody who ultimately carries the can?

Henry Dimbleby: I have tried to structure it as much as possible to make it have life, regardless of the leadership, but the position of an independent reviewer is clearly precarious and relies on trust and the relationships that you build both inside government and in other parties. I do not know whether a structural solution to that works.

The Chair: That is something we are contemplating ourselves. We will have to think about it by the time we finish our report.

Thank you, Henry. This has been a superb session. You have been an outstanding witness. Thank you very much indeed. As I said at the beginning, there will be a transcript. You will get a copy of it to correct before it is finally published on our website. We look forward to seeing your diagnosis and vision report in May, if coronavirus does not impede it. We will continue to share with your team our thinking as we develop it. It is a very useful relationship.