

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 23 November 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 November 2021.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Duncan Baker; Bob Blackman; Patricia Gibson; Nigel Mills; Kate Osborne.

Questions 1-7

Witnesses

I: Wera Hobhouse.

II: Mr Steve Baker.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Wera Hobhouse made representations.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have two applications this afternoon. The first is a customer whom we have seen on a number of occasions before, Wera Hobhouse. The application is on the subject of “Support for the UK’s transition to electric vehicles by 2030”.

Wera Hobhouse: Thank you very much, Chair. I assume you have read the outline of my application, so I will not repeat everything. It is important that we have a debate. Because we have the 2030 target, we need to be ready for it. People are buying electric vehicles but finding increasingly that they cannot charge them or cannot charge them in time. The uptake of electric vehicles at a very large scale obviously prompts a question about electricity supply.

We have had a number of important announcements. For example, the Government have been talking about new buildings that have a mandatory requirement for electric vehicle charging access, so this debate is important for a number of reasons. We have had COP and we do not want to lose the momentum. I know there is a large appetite to debate this. We have the APPG on electric vehicles, for example, which is cross party. We had a number of EDMs that show that the debate is increasingly important.

We also need to talk about whether we have the skills force ready for the maintenance of the electric vehicles that are going to be bought in increasing numbers. There is also the question of affordability and the second-hand market. These are the broad outlines of why I believe this is an important debate for Parliament.

Chair: Thank you.

Q2 **Bob Blackman:** If we allocate this to Westminster Hall, which is a possibility, which would be the answering Department? One of the problems here is that there are BEIS, MHCLG and Transport—who do you see as the answering Department?

Wera Hobhouse: Good question. I would be happy with any of those. I think BEIS is important because my main question is about the energy that we need, so an energy Minister should reply. Equally, the Department for Transport would probably be the best to reply.

Q3 **Chair:** I am thinking about infrastructure. From that perspective, would it not be MHCLG in terms of the planning aspects and the requirements to put into regulation that any new build would have those facilities in it?

Wera Hobhouse: It is a good question. It is called DLUCH now, I think. Indeed, it is also about planning, so it is very much a cross-departmental debate. The question is what we focus on. Personally, I think it is probably BEIS, because I worry most about electricity supply, but all the other Departments would be suitable too.



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Q4 **Bob Blackman:** The other issue is availability. We obviously get limited time. We can almost guarantee time in Westminster Hall, but Chamber time is up to the Government. It is likely that your request will get a Westminster Hall allocation, potentially 2 or 9 December, if you are free. Would either of those Thursdays suit?

Wera Hobhouse: The 2nd or 8th of December?

Bob Blackman: Or the 9th.

Wera Hobhouse: I cannot see any particular reasons why not.

Chair: Excellent, that is very much appreciated.

Steve Baker made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** We now have Mr Steve Baker. Welcome Steve, it is good to see you. Thank you for coming along. The application this afternoon is on "Generating opportunity, wealth and liberty through co-operatives and mutuals".

Mr Steve Baker: Mr Mearns, thank you for the opportunity to come before the Committee. This is an important debate, because the Government have the opportunity as we emerge from coronavirus to harness co-operatives and mutuals as a tool for spreading opportunity, wealth and liberty across the country. I have always believed that co-operatives are an important part of a free society. With the Conservatives—us—having been in power for 11 years, it is important we continue to highlight the movement.

In addition to being a cross-party debate, it is also supported by Co-operatives UK. We need to make sure that proactive support for co-operatives and mutuals becomes part of the Government's levelling-up agenda. In some answers, including written answers, the Government have mentioned co-operatives—for example, saying "Co-operatives bring something different from other forms of businesses to the landscape and communities of the country." There are some signs that the Government support co-operatives, but we want to make sure that the Government has a much more proactive approach to ensuring that people are able to come together and do things to lift up their own communities in a way that transcends politics and goes beyond the normal shareholder capitalism.

That is the pitch, Mr Mearns. If this debate is granted, Members would be able to question the Government on the extent to which they are harnessing the potential of co-operatives and mutuals to contribute to levelling up. The debate would also serve as an opportunity for Members to discuss the instrumental role that good business and an entrepreneurial culture must play in the creation of a fairer and high skills, higher wage economy.

Q6 **Bob Blackman:** Which Department would be answering?

Mr Steve Baker: I would like BEIS to answer, because, when it comes to the structure of our economy and the different forms of corporate entity, I



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think BEIS should take a strong view. Very often it is the Treasury that answers, largely because of the nature of mutuals and co-ops having been in the financial sector and so it has been about financial regulation. From my point of view, the Treasury is very much an accounting Department, so I would love to see BEIS taking a very proactive approach to reshaping the landscape of entrepreneurship through co-ops.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** In which case, would Tuesday 14 December at 9.30 in Westminster Hall suit you?

Mr Steve Baker: Tuesday the 14th at 9.30? Yes, thank you, Mr Blackman.

Chair: You might find that that is available. I don't know. You can never second-guess these things. If that slot were to become available, we would certainly have you under consideration.

Mr Steve Baker: Thank you, Mr Mearns.

Chair: That concludes our public deliberations. Thank you.