

# THE HOUSE<sup>®</sup>

PARLIAMENT'S MAGAZINE SINCE 1976

NO.1717 • VOLUME 45 • 7 FEBRUARY 2022



**THE  
FOOD  
AND  
DRINK  
EDITION**

PARLIAMENT'S  
RESTAURANTS  
REVIEWED

**Your  
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SUPPLY  
CHAIN  
STRAIN

**How  
much is  
an MP  
worth?**

**ANNE-MARIE  
TREVELYAN**  
INTERVIEW



Henry Dimbleby | Victoria Prentis  
Baroness Boycott | Luke Pollard  
Lord Bruce

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**SUBSCRIPTIONS** 0207 593 5510 • dods@escosubs.co.uk  
 Dods Group Subscriptions, c/o ESCO, Trinity House,  
 Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield, Braintree CM7 4AY

*The House* magazine is published by Dods, 11th Floor, The Shard, 32 London Bridge Street, London, SE1 9SG. • Printed in the UK by The Magazine Printing Company using only paper from FSC/PEFC suppliers; www.magprint.co.uk • The Publisher and Editor are most grateful to the Clerk of the Parliaments, the Clerk of the House and other Senior Officers of both Houses for the support and advice they readily give. • All MP byline photos by UK Parliament. • All photos by Alamy Images and Adobe Stock unless stated otherwise. • Redesign devised by ANTONELLO STICCA.

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**ABC** Average circulation per issue: 2,524, July 2020-June 2021

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# FROM THE CHAIR



**Sir Graham Brady**

*The House Advisory Board Chair*

"One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well," proclaimed Virginia Woolf. Yet from the negative headlines in recent times around supply chains, along with increasingly vocal discontent voiced by the farming sector, one might wonder if the UK's capacity to dine well is at threat.

In this edition of *The House* we look at food and drink, and policy editor Georgina Bailey speaks to Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan about how she will be flying the flag for Global Britain – which to her means boosting "levelling up" and the green agenda – and why you can never say no to Michael Gove.

Looking in more depth at the topic, Adam Payne speaks to government tsar David Lewis about how he's planning to tackle the long-term challenges facing the supply chain. Henry Dimbleby, the founder of Leon restaurants, is awaiting a formal response to his National Food Strategy report: he tells us why we need to break the damaging junk food cycle. Among other entertaining diversions, we sent top restaurant critic Tanya Gold to review Parliament's eateries, invited MPs and peers to tell us about their favourite pubs, and asked what makes Parliament's jerk chicken so tasty.

That's far from all. For *Where Are They Now?* we catch up with former Conservative MP Charlotte Leslie. We look at the thorny issue of MPs' pay. And Lord Young tells us how (not) to rebel. All this and more in your *House* magazine. 🍷

## NEWS

By Noa Hoffman

### Hundreds of MPs sign Book of Remembrance

**H**undreds of MPs signed a Book of Commitment in Parliament to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, pledging to honour and remember those who died at the hands of Nazis throughout the Second World War.



The event held on 27 January, the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp, saw MPs representing all parties pay tribute to the work of survivors, many of whom continue to educate younger generations through sharing their testimonies.

Karen Pollock, chief executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which organised the Book of Commitment, said: "As the Holocaust fades from living memory, it falls on all of us to

ensure that their stories and the stories of the six million Jewish men, women and children brutally murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators, are never forgotten.

"We know that the leaders of our country are committed to remembering the Holocaust and learning its enduring lessons for today. By signing the Book of Commitment, they are reaffirming that support."

Boris Johnson heard the testimony of 92-year-old survivor Manfred Goldberg, who was born in central Germany and spent more than eight months as a child slave labourer in Stutthof concentration camp.

Speaking to the Prime Minister in Downing Street, Goldberg said leaders must ensure the Holocaust is never permitted to "be relegated to fading history".

Johnson said: "It is hard to imagine a childhood narrative that could be more horrific, or more powerful, or more important.

"We must use this testimony to banish all complacency from our hearts; because it is not enough to remember, we must make sure that everyday, in everything we do, we take action to stamp out prejudice and anti-Semitism in this country." 🍷

### Thanksgiving service for Baroness O'Cathain

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life and work of Baroness

O'Cathain will be held in St Margaret's Church, Westminster, at noon on 8 March.

To register, go to: [baronessocathain.eventbrite.co.uk](https://baronessocathain.eventbrite.co.uk) 🍷





By Georgina Bailey

## UK delegation to new UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership

**T**he United Kingdom's parliamentary delegation to the newly created UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) has been confirmed. Consisting of 21 MPs and 14 peers, the UK delegation will be chaired by Sir Oliver Heald MP and joined by 35 MEPs from the European Parliament.

The PPA was established under the terms of the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA), and acts as a forum for the two parliaments to exchange views. It is expected to meet and report twice a year.

Heald said: "The PPA will have a crucial role to play in ensuring there is proper parliamentary oversight of the important Trade and Co-operation Agreement.

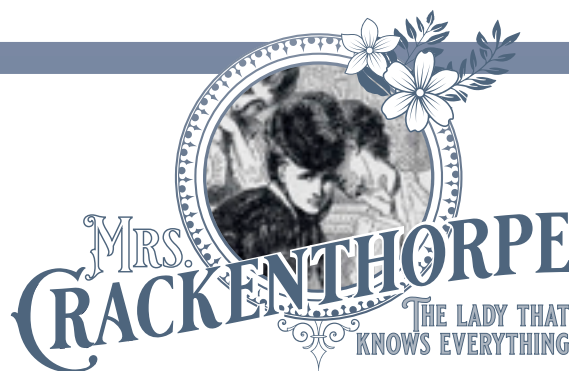
"I'm looking forward to the first meeting of the PPA and working with our colleagues in the European Parliament to find new ways of co-operating with our closest neighbour and largest trading partner."

The full membership can be found in the written ministerial statement made by the Prime Minister on 26 January 2022. 🇬🇧

## Late MP James Brokenshire has train named after him

A train named for former Old Bexley and Sidcup MP James Brokenshire has been unveiled by rail minister Wendy Morton. Brokenshire, who died of lung cancer last year, had been a transport enthusiast since childhood and was an avid campaigner for rail improvements and new, modern trains that would benefit his constituents. The train in Brokenshire's honour was made by Siemens Mobility and operated by Southeastern Trains.

Catherine Brokenshire, James' wife, said he would have been "delighted" to have one of the trains he campaigned for named after him. So far, £65,000 has been raised in his memory for the Roy Castle Foundation. To donate, go to: [jamesbrokenshire.muchloved.com](https://jamesbrokenshire.muchloved.com) 🇬🇧



**I**t's been another mad and mess-ridden few weeks in Wild Westminster, as our illustrious leader Boris de Pfeffel continues to cling to his throne amid partygate chaos. Unlike the preachers and party poopers of SW1, Mrs C thoroughly enjoys a booze-filled bash – and the ensuing havoc they wreak. So without further ado, here's what pricked Mrs C's ears this week...

**M**rs C hears her friends in the Cabinet Office have ladened the walls of 70 Whitehall with "reshuffle boards," in anticipation of Boris throwing a surprise ministerial hokey cokey. One MP in the know suggested a shuffle is coming amid pressure from Tories for "the boss" to overhaul his top team.

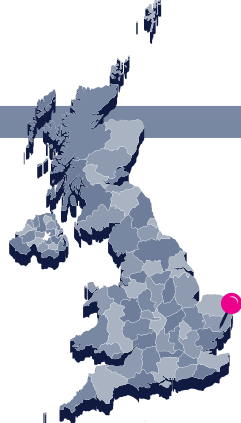
**S**peaking of reshuffles, future minister and Braveheart of the North Jake Berry, has offered his apologies in private to my fellow 18th century heartthrob, Jacob Rees-Mogg. Berry accused the Moggster of "crocodile tears" over the impending National Insurance rise. "If Jacob Rees-Mogg wants to vote with his feet that's up to him," he told *Times Radio* in January. Mrs C is delighted to hear the pair promptly made up. Northerners everywhere rejoice.

**M**rs C was utterly delighted to welcome in February, as with it came the reopening of her beloved watering hole, Strangers. On re-opening night, I was only too happy to see antics quickly turn from respectable to rowdy. Mrs C overheard one inebriated Labour MP being told to "shut up and drink your pint" by a chivalrous Irish staffer. The MP in question had been having a heated discussion with a separate staffer in his own party – so much so that Strangers fell silent before the hero Irishman stepped in to relieve patrons of the awkwardness.

**A** seat on Labour's parliamentary committee – think the 1922 but without the sex and violence – isn't usually the hottest ticket in town. So Mrs C was intrigued to see not one, not two but four candidates throw their hat into the ring for the chance to have a weekly cuppa with Keith Starmer. Congrats to the victor, Barbara Keeley, surely a Sir Graham Brady in the making. Tips to [MrsCrackenthorpe@protonmail.com](mailto:MrsCrackenthorpe@protonmail.com). 🇬🇧

## CONSTITUENCY

# MATTERS



**Tom Hunt**  
Conservative MP

## Ipswich

With a strong claim as England's oldest Anglo-Saxon town, Ipswich is a vibrant port with historic and cultural values ingrained in its past. The original settlement centred around the port, which remains the same hub of activity and trade today.

The name "Ipswich" comes from the Old English, Gippeswic, an indication of our town's long history. With first settlements dating back to the early 600s and the Anglo-Saxons, the town became a centre of the pottery trade, attaining national importance.

One of Ipswich's most famous figures was Cardinal Wolsey – Lord Chancellor (chief adviser) to Henry VIII. His legacy still stands in the town; just across from the iconic waterfront and harbour, a 16th century relic reminds us of Ipswich's rich history.

Serving in the court of Henry VIII, Wolsey contributed to the prowess of the king on the European stage, as well as orchestrating peace between Christian countries. Aside from his statesmanship, Wolsey dedicated much of his time and wealth to create impressive palaces: Wolsey rebuilt Whitehall's York Place, as well as transforming Hampton Court. He took a great interest in educational institutions, founding the college which would later become Christ Church, Oxford. Wolsey intended to see his home of Ipswich flourish as a hub of learning, planning to create feeder schools for his then-called Cardinal College, with the predominant one being in Ipswich. However, the clergyman was thwarted in his ambitions; the rise of Anne Boleyn saw Wolsey's decline, and with him the visions of his school in Ipswich.

While the school was never completed, works began while Wolsey was still in favour in court; an entrance was constructed for those arriving by boat on the River Orwell, the banks of which are less expansive today. This gate stands as a cherished landmark in the town, a reminder of Ipswich's long history, and a tangible illustration of this local anecdote. 🏰

## NEWS

By Sally Dawson

## Introducing... Anna Firth MP

**N**ewly-elected Conservative MP Anna Firth knows she has "huge boots to fill" following her by-election victory in Southend West. Paying tribute to her predecessor Sir David Amess, who died while holding a constituency surgery in October, Firth said it was "the most incredible honour to follow such an inspiring constituency MP".

Firth added that her principal task was to build on his legacy: "Sir David's greatest aim was to secure city status for Southend, which he has done. And my aim is for us to make the most of city status, that he worked so hard to secure, and make Southend City the best seaside city in the country."

As well as putting in a renewed bid for Southend to become a UK City of Culture, Firth wants to secure more resources to fund extra police officers and improvements in health care.

Addressing educational opportunities is also a priority. Horrified by the widening of inequality in education as a result of home schooling during the pandemic, Firth founded Britain's first free online school, the Invicta National Academy, in July 2020.

National director of the Conservative Policy Forum, and a former Sevenoaks councillor, Firth ran to become an MP twice before, including in Canterbury in 2019. A barrister for more than 10 years until she took a career break to raise her three children, Firth says her decade's experience "fighting to make a difference to real people" was excellent training for her new job.

The first locally-born MP to represent Southend West, she credits her schoolteacher mother, who raised Firth and her brother on her own, for instilling in her the values of a good education, working hard, aiming high and giving back. "And I believe that those are core Conservative values. I also happen to believe that they're the values upon which Mrs Thatcher made us a force in the world again. And I'd even go as far as to say those are Southend values." 🏰



New MP for Southend West, Anna Firth



By Hope Virgo

Author and founder of #DumpTheScales

## How to... talk to a constituent about eating disorders

**E**ating disorders are among the most stigmatised illnesses; often viewed as a lifestyle choice, something that someone grows out of, a phase. The reality is eating disorders are a really serious mental illnesses with the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder.

I am sure many of your communications with constituents will be about eating disorders, involving people desperate for support, and, perhaps like so many, you may not entirely know how to respond.

When you have a constituent contact you about eating disorders it is important you don't judge the severity of their illness based on what they look like. Only six per cent of people with an eating disorder are underweight, and so many of the stereotypes around eating disorders not only stop people reaching out for support but also consume a person with shame. Eating disorders are not about food or weight but something going on for that person.

Don't assume the eating disorder is connected to the pandemic; they could have been struggling before Covid-19 or it could have begun during coronavirus but have been triggered by something unrelated.

Always have a list of places to signpost people to.

Treat them like a human! We all know there are issues around funding, access to treatment and support, so being honest is really important. We don't want a textbook answer; sometimes people want empathy!

Suzanne Baker, of the eating disorder support group FEAST, says: "The first thing we always give is hope – often a carer will never have heard this. Full recovery from an eating disorder is possible. Timely detection and access to evidence-based treatment from a specialist eating disorder service is key".

Talk about the stories you hear in Parliament. We all know the stats, but behind every stat is a story and perhaps it is easy to ignore them when they are nameless and faceless. Bring these experiences to Parliament, to conversations you have with your colleagues and share what you are seeing in your constituency. 🍷



Lord Young

Conservative chief whip 2012-2014

## How (not) to rebel

When the *Spectator* made me Backbencher of the Year for leading the rebellion against Margaret Thatcher's flagship policy – the Poll Tax – you would have got long odds against me rejoining her government two years later, let alone later becoming government chief whip.

But it is possible to stick up for what you believe in and vote against your party, and also have a ministerial career.

Others better known than me have done so – though none have joined the government five times. Rebelling is not a painless option, and I would always advocate loyalty to the party – unless it means selling your soul to the devil.

So what is my advice if you simply can't vote for a measure?

First, tell the whips why – and give them an opportunity to talk you round. Ask to see the minister if they don't have the answers. Talk to colleagues who share your doubts, but plan to support the government.

Second, abstain rather than vote against, if your conscience can live with that.

Third, don't become a serial rebel – there used to be a rule: "Don't rebel on more than one issue, it confuses the whips."

Fourth, explain to your local party Association what you are up to and why.

Fifth, where there are other government policies that you support, back them publicly.

Finally, when, having followed my advice, you become chief whip a little later, be tolerant of and patient with those who plan to vote against you. While I welcomed all those who loyally supported the government through thick and thin, I had quiet admiration for those who rebelled honourably.

But, please, don't take it as far as Christian Wakeford and cross the floor. 🍷



**Baroness Boycott**  
Crossbench peer

**T**he heating in my office has been unreliable of late and I have done many Zooms in my trusty winter coat, sometimes with gloves. In our climate committee we took evidence from the governor of Tokyo where buildings account for 70 per cent of all carbon emissions. One solution is to abandon the traditional Japanese working outfit – suit and tie for men, dress and jacket for women. Now men are expected to wear short sleeve shirts and women to forgo their jackets. The temperature will be kept at 28 degrees.

**H**aving just returned from Colombia, I've been luxuriating in similar warmth. I was in the Caribbean port of Cartagena for the 17th annual Hay Festival. I've been involved with Hay for more than 25 years and have seen it grow from collection of wobbly tents in a wet Welsh field to an international wonder. We came to Colombia because south American writers like Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez said the continent needed a forum where stories could be shared and ideas mingled. The early years were scary. Festival director Cristina Fuentes La Roche was carjacked on her way into Bogota. That nearly derailed our plans, but we pushed on, choosing Cartagena as it has an extra police force, due to a naval base. Still, it wasn't unusual to see armed guards hovering round street corners and outside the hotels.

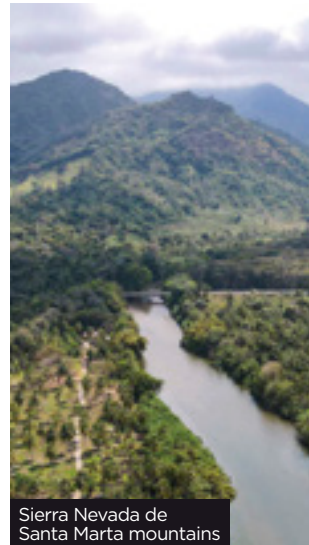
### "Cocaine is Colombia's curse"

**O**ver the 17 years we've played a role in Colombian affairs, being able to take complex government decisions to the public even as talks were happening behind the scenes. In 2015, the first public event to discuss the peace process took place at Hay, while talks were happening in Havana.

When President Santos was wrestling with the problems of cocaine he chose Hay to make his declarations. Cocaine is Colombia's curse. It distorts all attempts at lasting peace and has been the major driver of the longest conflict in South America. Santos announced legalisation of some kind was the only way forward but, he said firmly, Colombia could not do this alone. The rest of the world had to join in. It hasn't worked: every year, the area of land put down to growing coca increases. The US blames the Colombians and ignores the fact that they – and indeed us – are guilty of rising consumption.

Washington is currently pressuring the Colombian government to start respraying vast acres of land where coca might be grown with organophosphates, which destroy huge tracts of pristine and bio-diverse land. Colombia's biodiversity is among the world's richest – 19 per cent of the world's bird species are found there; almost 10 per cent are unique.

**S**everal years ago my friend the writer Ben Okri and I went bird watching in the Santa Marta mountains following the festival. Our guide was an ex-Liverpool docker who wound up as one of Colombia's greatest bird experts. We spend days walking through forests as he tried to coax birds from the trees with remarkable mimicry. Staying in the same lodge with us were some hardy birders from Yorkshire. They were armed with a printout of every bird in the world, laboriously ticking off their "sightings". They dragged around a ghetto blaster with which to play relevant bird calls, but our guide told us the birds had grown savvy and were fed up with gliding to ground in the hope of meeting a mate, instead finding themselves face-to-face with a lump of metal made in Japan.



Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains



Bogota 2014 Then-Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos at a cocaine seizure operation

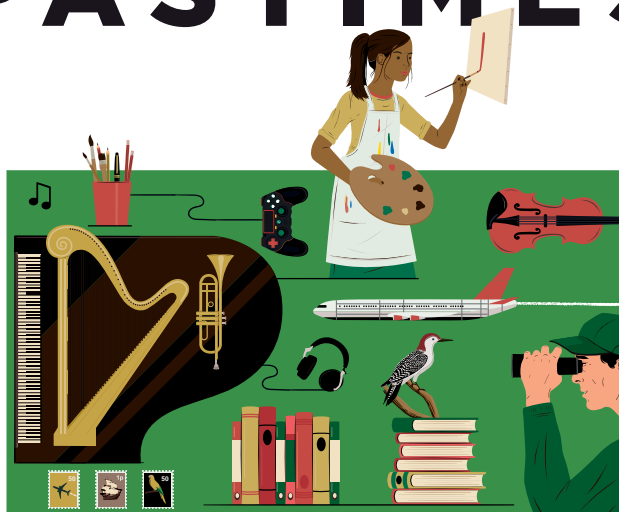
**O**ver lunch with my friend Brigitte Baptiste, the leading Colombian environmentalist who used to head up the Humboldt Institute, I learn that the latest way to launder cocaine money is through growing avocados.

The appetite for them is as furious as for cocaine. Even though the Colombian government has offered "incentives" to farmers to change their crops, frankly the money will not add up. We badly need the world to start telling a new story about drugs. 🌱





# PASTIMES



In her occasional series, **Rosamund Urwin** meets up with parliamentarians to discuss how they unwind away from Westminster. Here, **Baroness Miller** tells of life on her French vineyard

**W**hen grapes were being stripped from some of her vines, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer thought the thieves must be the local deer. So when she checked a wildlife camera in her French vineyard, she had a surprise. "I captured a picture of a badger standing on its hind legs, pulling them off," she says, laughing. "They particularly liked the Cabernet Sauvignon."

Miller, who was elevated to the Lords in 1998 and served as Liberal Democrat spokesperson on the environment, food and rural affairs, sold the vineyard in Dordogne at the start of this month after 12 years, as her husband, Humphrey Temperley, had a stroke. Their award-winning wine, made under the Chateau Lestevenie label and sold directly to clients, includes a dry white, a rosé, two reds, a dessert wine and a crémant (sparkling wine).

The couple's mission has been "agroecology": protecting nature alongside agricultural production, for example by using poultry manure instead of chemical

fertiliser. Of the 32 hectares, 15 are vineyards, the rest is half oak woodland and half meadows with wildflowers – perfect habitats for animals. Miller, who worked in publishing before leading South Somerset District Council, started the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Agroecology 11 years ago, hoping to spread the idea



that "we can still feed the world, but farm in a much more nature-sensitive way".

The couple bought the vineyard after tragedy struck. In 2001, Miller's older daughter, Charlotte, was killed in an accident in Ecuador at the age of 19. Two years later, Miller developed a brain tumour, which fortunately turned out to be benign. "The Lords is a great place if you suffer anything like that because people have a lot of life experience and

they're very sympathetic and able to help," she says. "Death isn't a taboo to them."

Charlotte's death made her reassess her life: "The idea grew on us that we wanted to do something different. Politics is so cerebral; I wanted to go back to something more practical." Humphrey had been a farmer in Somerset, raising sheep, growing vegetables and making cider, but had sold up. They both liked France and Miller realised she could commute weekly to London while Parliament was sitting. "When we first came here, we both said: 'This is just like Somerset was 30 years ago – it's rolling hills, valleys and woods. No traffic.'"

The land has been home to a vineyard since 1722. The French, she adds, are ahead on agroecology, with lots of seminars and advice available. Miller feels that too much of the conversation in the UK is about rewilding – "which has its place, but is the trend of the moment" – when we should be talking about integrating nature into all environments, even urban ones. "My worry is that rewilding is something only larger landowners have the ability to do," she argues. "For tenant farmers and smaller farmers, it's really about farming in a way that you are sharing the land with nature."

The couple were part of France's National Biodiversity Observatory, which studied their earthworms and butterflies, to work out how to improve the soil to help insects. "That feeds through – forgive the pun! – to your birds," she says. It also helps the gardener's traditional foe, the mole.

Miller sees them differently, recalling something the late environmental campaigner Lord Melchett told her. "He said you have to remember that moles are to our landscape as lions are to the Serengeti" she says. "They're top of the food chain, so if your soil, invertebrates and earthworms are all in great condition, you'll have lots of moles. Too often people see moles as a terrible thing and they kill them – but they're really a marker of the quality of your soil." 🐹

*Rosamund Urwin is a journalist with the Sunday Times*

# Open Doors World Watch List 2022 Report

**O**n Wednesday 19 January, Open Doors launched its annual World Watch List for 2022. Each year, Open Doors compiles a report which sets out the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian, and which describes trends in persecution that affect Christians and other religious minorities worldwide. Normally held in Parliament, restrictions meant that the launch took place online again this year, with 93 MPs represented.

In a dramatic change, Afghanistan is now the most dangerous country in the world to be a Christian, displacing North Korea for the first time in two decades – though the situation in North Korea has not improved.

The report also describes how the global persecution of Christians has reached its highest level since the World Watch List began nearly 30 years ago. More than 360 million Christians now suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith – 20 million more than last year. One Christian in every seven suffers in this way worldwide.

At the launch, an Open Doors fieldworker from China described the increasing digital surveillance and persecution of the church in that country. We also heard from Illia Djadi, an



Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, shared the findings of the World Watch List with those attending the online launch.

expert from Open Doors International, about the growing violence against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa

Responding to the report, Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, expressed her gratitude to Open Doors for its work, and restated the Government's commitment to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

That commitment is particularly important this year, as the Bishop of Truro's report on the persecution of Christians and the FCDO's response is due to be reviewed, and the International Ministerial to Advance FoRB takes place in London in July. We hope that the World Watch List report will inform fresh efforts to promote FoRB and tackle persecution worldwide.

## Take action

If you are a parliamentarian, please do act on the report's recommendations by asking the UK Government to:

- Promote and protect Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as a priority in its foreign policy;
- Consider human rights in general and FoRB specifically in trade negotiations; and
- Ensure that the review of the Truro Report leads to substantial, structural and visible change within the FCDO.



If you would like a copy of the World Watch List 2022 report, or if you require support from Open Doors, please contact us at: [advocacy@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:advocacy@opendoorsuk.org).



**Open Doors**

SERVING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE





## Weeks after defecting from the Conservatives, **Christian Wakeford** tells **Eleanor Langford** about life as a Labour MP

In a matter of hours, Christian Wakeford went from a relatively unknown backbencher to one of the most talked about men in Britain. All eyes were on the Bury South MP as he took his place a few rows behind Keir Starmer at Prime Ministers' Questions, having just taken the seismic decision to defect to Labour from the Conservative Party.

"My number one achievement that day was not throwing up," Wakeford, 37, says over coffee in Portcullis House. "Considering I was sat behind Keir, I'm sure he's greatly appreciative of that."

He describes his phone in the days afterwards as "carnage," with more than 300 WhatsApp messages, 1,800 emails and "God knows how many missed calls". Such was his newfound fame that he was even recognised on a parliamentary

trip to Ukraine.

Wakeford adds, however, what he was most nervous about was his first meeting with the Constituency Labour Party in Bury South. The atmosphere was apparently "moderate," with members mainly just "trying to understand" what had led the former Tory to join their ranks.

"I'm committed to working with them, to actually deliver on the issues that really matter, from cost of living to some of the issues I'm passionate about, such as alcohol harm and literacy."

He continues: "I'm not expecting everyone to be my best friend on day one. It will be a challenge, because I've been campaigning against them and they've been campaigning against me. It will take some time. Hopefully, they see that there is

a commitment there to make it work."

As for the Parliamentary Labour Party, Wakeford says he's had a warm welcome. "It's like being the new kid in school. People want to chat and see how you are

### "Boris Johnson isn't suitable to be a leader, let alone a Prime Minister"

in the hallway. It has been very welcoming."

The reaction from his former party has been markedly more mixed. He says many Tory MPs have come up to him in



Parliament to ask after him, kindnesses he says that are "greatly appreciated". Others, however, have not been as supportive.

"Cancelling my direct debit for the... Party membership the day after was an interesting [experience]," he laughs.

"It was unfortunate that it got into quite nasty personal briefings against me. But if the lowest you can get is personal attacks, then actually that just reinforces that it was the right decision."

He insists that there was no "final straw" that pushed him to join Labour, and that he had "slowly been going in that direction" for some time. "There had obviously been quite a few moments where [the Tories] had been incredibly annoying," Wakeford explains.

"They were reeling out minister after minister to defend the indefensible. It was unedifying. I was slowly coming to the realisation that the party I had been in for 18 years had changed and I had changed."

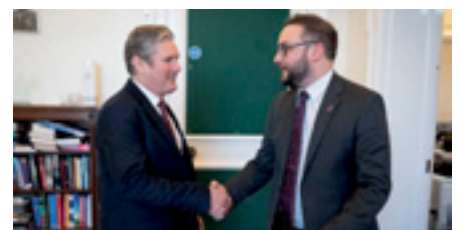
In the weeks since his defection, Wakeford says the Prime Minister's response to the fallout from Sue Gray's update into her "partygate" investigation has done little to make him regret his decision.

"Boris Johnson isn't suitable to be a leader, let alone a Prime Minister," he adds. "It all just reinforces that the decision I made... was actually the right one."

As many Tory MPs mull over the future of their party, does Wakeford have a message for his ex-colleagues on the fence about their leader?

"For those who've written letters but have not submitted them, I say: If not now, when?"

He continues: "They owe it to the country and to themselves to actually bring it forward, to make sure that he's replaced. The longer it goes on, the more damage is caused!"



# ‘Levelling up’ oral health

Analysis of health data conducted by the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme has found significant oral health disparities across the country. To tackle the problem and avoid worsening inequalities, the nation needs a plan to level up oral health, improve access to dental care and increase education around preventative methods.

Living through the pandemic has taught us the importance of looking after the nation's health. The Government's ambition to 'level up' our health is both timely and critical and will require a coordinated approach across the health system. Promoting good oral health is a key part of this – poor oral health outcomes often indicate poor overall health outcomes for individuals.

Disruption caused by the pandemic has taken a toll on our oral health – with existing inequalities exacerbated. Despite the incredible efforts of the dental industry to ensure patients can access care, they continue to face huge backlogs. Over 35 million NHS dental appointments have been lost due to the pandemic<sup>1</sup> and 80% of patients found it difficult to access timely dental care<sup>2</sup>.

**"Yorkshire and Humber have 75% higher levels of extractions and the North West and North East both experience 50% higher levels than the national average"**

Analysis of Public Health England data conducted by the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme (WOHP) has found significant oral health disparities across the country. Using an indicator of hospital tooth extractions as percentage of the population of 0–19-year-olds, the research found considerable variation across Local Authorities. At the point people require hospital extractions, they are likely to have progressed to very late stages of poor oral health.

The research found that the England-wide number of tooth extractions as a percentage of the population of 0–19-year-olds is 0.4%<sup>3</sup>. Concerningly, some regions have significantly higher levels of extractions – Yorkshire and Humber

have 75% higher levels of extractions and the North West and North East both experience 50% higher levels than the national average. There is also variation in outcomes within regions, with some Local Authorities performing significantly worse than others within regions – the South West in particular experiences high levels of variation.

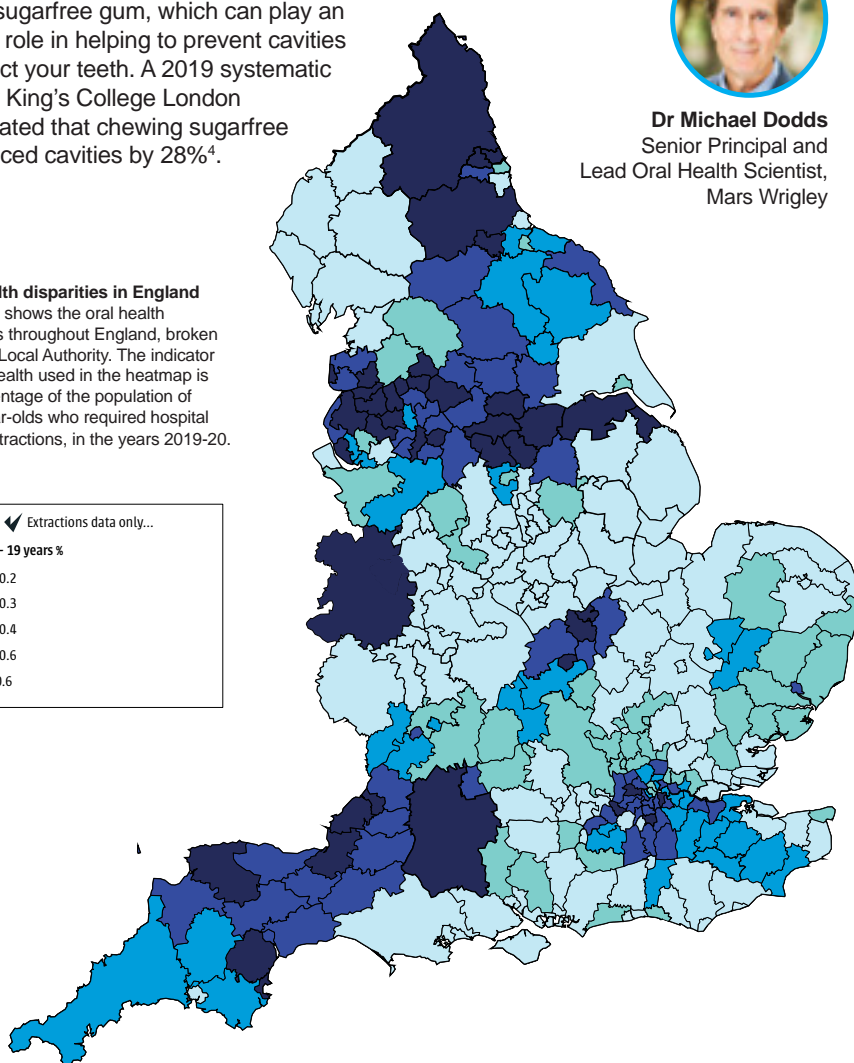
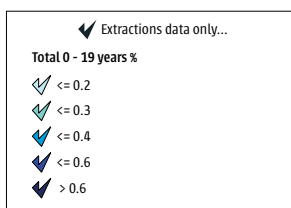
Given the pressure on dental practices, preventative measures have never been more important. Brushing your teeth twice a day is crucial, as is using additional oral health tools like flossing. There are also accessible interventions like chewing sugarfree gum, which can play an important role in helping to prevent cavities and protect your teeth. A 2019 systematic review by King's College London demonstrated that chewing sugarfree gum reduced cavities by 28%<sup>4</sup>.

To tackle the backlog and prevent worsening inequalities, the nation will need a plan for levelling up the oral health of regions with poor outcomes. This could include improving access to dental care and increased education around preventative oral methods. Preventative measures will play a crucial role in the coming years to support the dental industry in tackling the backlog. Education around prevention will be critical to levelling up the nation's oral health, and WOHP stands ready to support these efforts.



**Dr Michael Dodds**  
Senior Principal and  
Lead Oral Health Scientist,  
Mars Wrigley

**Oral health disparities in England**  
This map shows the oral health outcomes throughout England, broken down by Local Authority. The indicator for oral health used in the heatmap is the percentage of the population of 0–19-year-olds who required hospital dental extractions, in the years 2019–20.







**Johnny Mercer**  
 Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View

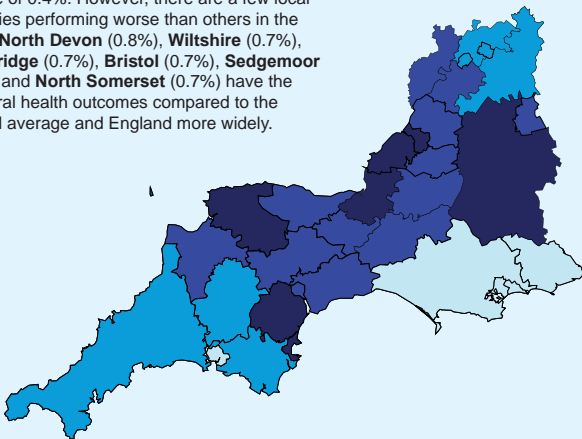
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**“The South West region has the highest levels of variation in oral health outcomes, demonstrating a need to rethink how we approach policies to improve oral health outcomes”**

.....

#### South West

The South West has relatively poor oral health outcomes overall, with an average of 0.5% of the population of 0-19-year-olds presenting for hospital tooth extractions, just above the England average of 0.4%. However, there are a few local authorities performing worse than others in the region. **North Devon** (0.8%), **Wiltshire** (0.7%), **Teignbridge** (0.7%), **Bristol** (0.7%), **Sedgemoor** (0.7%), and **North Somerset** (0.7%) have the worst oral health outcomes compared to the regional average and England more widely.



**T**he pandemic has opened our eyes to the link between inequality and health outcomes – with socio-economic inequalities clearly linked to poorer outcomes. Oral health is no exception, with inequalities being exacerbated by the pandemic.

At the same time, the dental industry is facing growing waiting lists while simultaneously dealing with an exodus of dental professionals from the NHS – data from the Department of Health found that almost 1,000 dentists working in 2,500 roles across England and Wales left the NHS last year.

In the South West region, where my constituency is based, there are worse oral health outcomes than average in England, according to the PHE data analysed by the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme. The region also has the highest levels of variation in outcomes, demonstrating a need to rethink how we approach policies to improve oral health outcomes.

Prevention will clearly need to play a key role in this. With the dental industry facing huge pressures, we must look to solutions to prevent the situation from worsening and support communities across the nation to look after their teeth.

In my constituency, there have been some excellent initiatives driving this agenda, with the Peninsula Dental School running programmes to educate children around a healthy dental routine. There are ongoing community engagement initiatives to promote the importance of looking after your oral health, including excellent work by Plymouth University to meet the dentistry needs of our most vulnerable and least accessible parts of society. Initiatives like these will be crucial to tackle oral health inequalities in the coming years, while we support the dental industry to recover.

We owe it to our constituents to ensure that their oral health doesn't take a further hit and that areas with worse outcomes are supported to improve. My party talks about levelling up, but it's time to put that into action – health disparities, including those in oral health, must be addressed.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> British Dental Association (2021). Omicron threat leaves dentists struggling to restore services. Available at: <https://bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/Pages/Omicron-threat-leaves-dentists-struggling-to-restore-services.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Healthwatch England (2021). Dentistry during COVID-19 insight briefing. Available at: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2021-05-24/dentistry-during-covid-19-insight-briefing>

<sup>3</sup> Public Health England (2020). Hospital Episode Statistics: Extractions data, 0-19 year olds, 2015-16 to 2019-20. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hospital-tooth-extractions-of-0-to-19-year-olds>

<sup>4</sup> Banerjee A. et al (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the role of sugar-free chewing gum in dental caries. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31743654/>



Ahead of Ipsa announcing its decision on whether it will recommend a pay increase for MPs after a year-long freeze, **Kate Proctor** looks at the thorny issue of MPs' salaries and asks whether leaders are engaged in "mutual destruction" on pay rises to keep the public onside

# HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?



**T**he amount MPs are paid for doing their job has become so controversial it is almost taboo to mention. "If I raise it, it'll be on my opponent's leaflet, won't it? You just don't talk about it. The only people that bring it up are on their last election and don't give a monkey's," one Labour MP says, suggesting colleagues keep their heads down even though they're fuming.

"You just get attacked online if you say MPs should be paid more," they say, reflecting on the roughing up senior Tory Sir Peter Bottomley received after he suggested MPs' pay was "grim".

The pandemic and associated economic suffering put a stop to the pay rise structure that had been in place since 2015 and which pegged MP salary hikes to public sector earnings. This means MPs have had their basic pay frozen at £81,932 since 2020. It's not a small salary by any means, more than twice the national average of around £31,000, but it is lower than a head teacher, a senior doctor and many who work in the legal profession.

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (Ipsa) said at the time it was right to cancel the rise because it would be inconsistent with the experience of constituents, many of whom were struggling financially as a result of the pandemic.

This month the body will report back on whether there should be a salary increase from 2022 to 2023. Given public sector average earnings increased by 2.7 per cent, MPs were on track to receive a rise of more than £2,000. While Ipsa has warned it reserves the right to vary the amount until 2024 because of the pandemic, Labour leader Keir Starmer has said he does not believe a rise of this amount would be appropriate in the current climate.

"I think that MPs do not need a pay rise and we should all be saying we don't need that pay rise and it shouldn't go ahead," he told *The Guardian* last month.

"The mechanism is independent but I think it's for me, as leader of the opposition, to say I do not think we should have that pay rise."

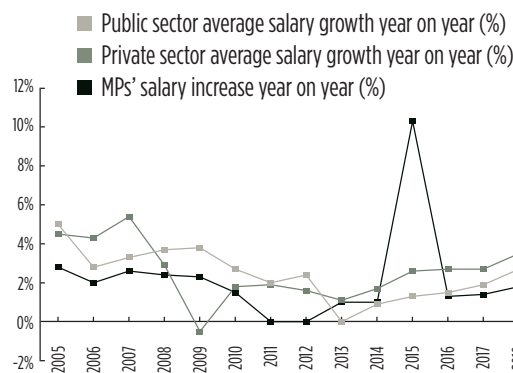
The Liberal Democrats went further, saying an increase now would be "shameful" while people are struggling. Boris Johnson has urged "restraint" from Ipsa over any recommended salary rise in the light of the current cost of living crisis, despite inflation running at 5.4 per cent.

The union Prospect has said a 3.1 per cent increase, the rate rumoured to be the suggestion from Ipsa, would be viewed negatively by civil servants who have pay increases capped at 2 per cent. And all this is against a background of wages going up in the private sector, with the year-on-year three-month average growth figure standing at 5.4 per cent after six years hovering between 2 per cent and 3.5 per cent.

MP sources tell *The House* that among those anticipating a rise, rather than a freeze, the expectation is the increase is likely to be anywhere between 1 per cent and 3 per cent, with the latter just below the pay deal secured for nurses. Between 2015 and 2020, annual increases varied between 1.3 and 3.1 per cent.

"You're already getting the Prime Minister saying restraint should be shown, and Keir Starmer saying MPs shouldn't get a pay increase, and you get this mutual destruction. It's like, 'We can go higher than you on what we think will play well with the public,'" says an MP, who did not wish to be named.

## MPs' YEARLY SALARY INCREASES COMPARED TO AVERAGE PUBLIC SECTOR AND PRIVATE SECTOR PAY INCREASES 2005 - 2022



Public and private sector average pay increases were sourced from ONS data, year on year three month average growth (%): seasonally adjusted regular pay excluding arrears, and taken from the October of each calendar year. MPs' salary information was taken from the House of Commons Library. Where MPs' pay increased more than once in a calendar year, increases were calculated from the higher amount each year.

"One of the things that's annoying people at the moment is we went through all that criticism about MPs voting for their own pay – though nine times out of 10 we voted for less than was recommended – and now it's independent and based on average public sector increases. In theory that's what happens, but obviously last year that didn't happen. So, what will happen next year?"

"People want to do this job, but they've told me they're glad they've never done it because of the money and the scrutiny you endure," the MP says.

The continuing reverberations from the 2009 expenses scandal means MPs are broadly still seen by many as undeserving of pay increases. The expenses furore unearthed a culture in which MPs felt able to – and, it is claimed, were even encouraged to – bolster their salary by using the taxpayer-funded expenses system.

It emerged that second-home allowances had been used to fund costs including repairing a swimming pool boiler and even cleaning a moat.

For decades, allowances had been subject to frequent increases as a means of bypassing the far more controversial salary aspect of their income, to the satisfaction of the public, who seemed to approve of the fact that annual increases often fell below those of average earnings.

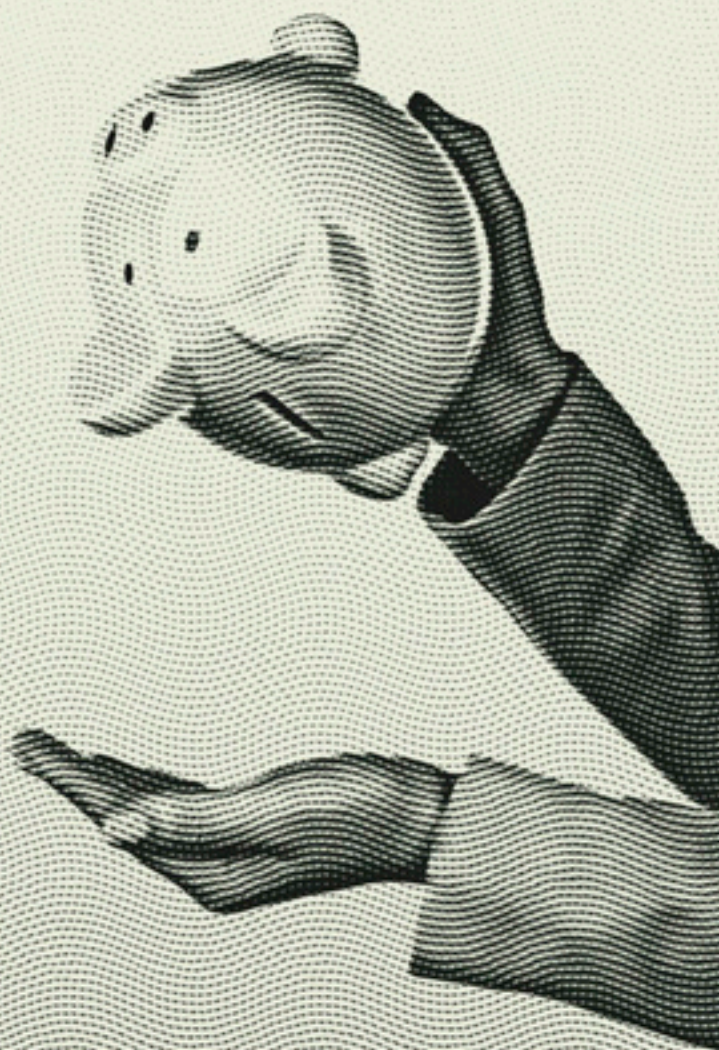
Post-expenses scandal, Ipsa was formed as an independent body to ensure the setting and regulating of pay and expenses was taken out of the hands of MPs.

"It's taken a decade for the jokes and the sarcastic comments to disappear, it's only just starting to wane now," one MP who was in the House at the time of the scandal says ruefully.

Bottomley, the Father of the House, suffered the wrath of social media when he suggested to the *New Statesman* that MPs should be paid more, perhaps on a par with GPs. Interviewed by *The House* he says he still believes the public sector-pegged pay increase system

**"You just get attacked online if you say MPs should be paid more"**





does not work well, and instead proposes that Ipsa sets pay at general elections to last a whole term, without increases.

On the size of the salary, Bottomley says: "A person who is less well-off or not earning, maybe a carer, or an employee in a shop, would get a significant increase if they became a Member of Parliament. [For] the person who is well-off, or a person of my age who doesn't have mortgages or dependent children, the rate of

pay doesn't really matter.

"Then there's a great group of people in between, and you start asking: what kind of people do you want in Parliament?

"You want to have people who are capable of being a middle-ranking judge, a reasonably successful lawyer... if you want people like that, what's the reason not to pay

**"You want people capable of being a middle-ranking judge, a reasonably successful lawyer... what's the reason not to pay them like that?"**

them like that? If you want people who are GPs in Parliament, that would be about £110,000 a year. If you want them to become a competent general practitioner in politics, what's the use in paying them less?

"I'm not saying every MP, at every stage of their life is worth it. I'm saying: what about those who are worth it?"

Bottomley makes the point that senior media figures who have used newspapers to lambast parliamentarians about salaries are often paid more than MPs.

A number of MPs take home more than the basic £81,932 salary, with cabinet ministers getting an additional £67,505, a minister of state receiving an extra £31,680, and a parliamentary under-secretary of state £22,475. Johnson as Prime Minister receives £75,440 on top of his MP salary. Select committee chairs also earn an additional wage of around £15,000 a year.

However, young back benchers new to Parliament, who haven't earned a high salary previously, can find themselves within a significant new wage bracket as an MP and yet still unable to get on the housing ladder because they haven't got a deposit. The bump in salary doesn't always equate to security when it comes to home ownership.

Tory MP for Hazel Grove in Cheshire, William Wragg, explained in 2016 to ITV's *Granada Debate* that he was part of the "boomerang generation" and had moved back in with his parents to try to save up for a deposit because he couldn't afford to buy a home of his own.

Wragg trained as a primary school teacher with Teach First then spent two years as a parliamentary caseworker, with neither salary likely to have passed £30,000. The then-28-year-old said it would likely take him a few years to save enough for a deposit.

A spokesperson for Ipsa says data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as well as other relevant information will be taken into account when reaching a decision.

With no pay rise since 2020, all eyes are on Ipsa to see if it will hold its nerve and return to the pre-pandemic salary increase system. There will be two camps: noisy, outraged MPs livid there is an increase they just can't sell to the public; and the silent ones, secretly deploring what they see as a descent into a Dutch auction to try to save face. Regardless of who wins, the debate on how to attract the right politicians rumbles on. 🇬🇧



# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**Charlotte Leslie,**

Conservative MP for Bristol North West, 2010 - 2017

**C**harlotte Leslie remembers waking in her parents' house in Bristol after her election in 2010 and thinking she should feel more important. "I did have a weird feeling that I should probably have a large beard and a top hat like Abraham Lincoln," she says.

Staying yourself and not getting swept away on the tide of people treating you as if you're "a bit important" is the biggest challenge for any MP, she says. "I don't think it's actually possible for anyone to do it."

A former competitive swimmer and beach lifeguard, Leslie compares the process to failing to notice you're being swept away by the current. "However good a swimmer you think you are, and however calm the sea seems to look, set yourself coordinates, and you've got to keep checking them. The more complacent you are, the more likely it is you've drifted way off course. I tried to take the same approach in politics."

Leslie was 31 when she was elected, having previously worked for then-shadow secretary of state for children David Willetts – something she says helped keep her feet on the ground

as an MP; Parliament didn't feel as special as it might otherwise

have. Politics had not been a life-long goal. Unsure what she wanted to do after university, Leslie took off travelling around America before a

planned masters degree. Afraid of heights, she was at the top of the Twin Towers in New York on 11 August 2001, discussing with a friend her fear that a bomb could go off underneath. When the Towers fell exactly a month later, she got one of the last flights home and cancelled her masters.

"I felt like there was a world that was literally blowing up out there, and I didn't know what was going on, but I knew I needed to be part of it, in the weird arrogant way of youth," she

says. "I couldn't sit in some ivory tower doing some pointless thesis on Ovid." Thus began a long-term interest in the Middle East. Leslie is now director of the Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC), which helps Conservative parliamentarians build their knowledge and relationships with the Middle East, a role that has generated headlines and latterly a Commons debate over her clash with multi-millionaire Tory donor Mohamed Amersi.

Leslie says she would run again as an MP, and she is on the approved candidates list. While she never achieved ministerial office – she says promotion wasn't a priority – her proudest achievements include working to protect NHS whistleblowers, saving a local historic pub, and helping create the Chartered College of Teaching.

She misses being able to sneak onto the roof of the Commons. "It helped me realise – despite being in the pressure cooker down below – what an extraordinary privilege it was."

Representing a marginal seat, losing in 2017 was not a surprise. "You're so conscious of it being a temporary thing and a privilege, almost like you're a tenant in the seat, you're a caretaker – it's not yours, it will pass on

to someone else. I made a decision that when difficult decisions came across my desk, I tried to think, 'what's this going to feel like when I look back on it?' I didn't always manage it, but I tried." When she lost, she knew she wouldn't have done anything differently: "I felt really at peace and really quite proud of the way I'd done it."

There was also an element of relief. "The weight of responsibility you feel for serving this area is enormous... I almost wept with [the] relief of no longer carrying that. That doesn't mean I didn't still care for my constituents, or I still didn't want to change and do things. But I [hadn't realised] how heavily that responsibility weighed on me." 🐼

Words by  
Georgina Bailey





# Championing Diversity, Accelerating Inclusion

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**DIVERSITY  
& INCLUSION**



THEHOUSE



Food and drink play a unique role in our lives, as both pleasure and necessity. So it's perhaps no wonder the subject has been drawn into the realm of politics in recent years. Trade Secretary **Anne-Marie Trevelyan** tells us how buying British is the answer to many of our recent supply chain problems, while

reporter **Adam Payne** hears from government tsar David Lewis how the crisis is being tackled. And to highlight the fun side of consumption, top restaurant critic **Tanya Gold** reviews Parliament's eateries and MPs and peers describe their favourite pubs.

# TRADING PLACES



As International Trade Secretary and a northern Tory, **Anne-Marie Trevelyan** is used to breaking down barriers. But flying the flag for Global Britain means boosting 'levelling up' and the green agenda too, she tells **Georgina Bailey**. Photography by Baldo Sciacca

**W**hen she was two years old, Anne-Marie Trevelyan was given a T-shirt that said "The Boss" on it. "For reasons that were self-evident, my mother says," she says with a grin, describing herself as a "headstrong" only child, raised in south-west London by her mother after her father died when she was two.

This obstinate approach has stayed with her. "I enjoy nothing better than kicking a door in and getting something to be fixed when it should work."

Unlike her predecessor as International Trade Secretary, Trevelyan, 52, doesn't gravitate towards the political spotlight – her Instagram account has more photos of her adopted county of Northumberland than carefully posed shots with international leaders. Her staff say she prefers to keep her head down and get on with things; "there is a reason" it is hard to find information about her personal life, she says.

She is funny too, smiling broadly and joking through most of our time together. She even pretend-growls at the curtains in the Churchill Room in the Old Admiralty Building, now home to the Department of International Trade (DIT), when I point out they're Liberal Democrat yellow.

Trevelyan's office, with views over Horse Guards Parade, is

**"You can't say no to Michael Gove, you never can"**





**“Australia was the first from-scratch deal we did so everybody didn’t quite know what it was going to look like. This is the first time we’ve been able to do this in 50 years”**



**April 2015** David Cameron and Trevelyan campaign in Alnwick



**May 2017** On the campaign trail with Theresa May near Newcastle



**September 2021** Trevelyan (second from left) attending Cabinet



adorned with Union and national flag cushions (although she is still looking for a Northern Ireland flag in cushion form to complete the set). Indeed, she is the only Cabinet minister to have her own flag: the flag of the President of the Board of Trade, a title dating back to the 1670s. It gives her the right to commandeer any navy ship, she tells *The House*, eyes twinkling. “It’s just the coolest thing ever.”

The building holds the Government Art Collection, and Trevelyan is also very fond of the portrait of the Queen which hangs on her office wall, and is keen to get a photograph in front of it. “I probably

shouldn’t say this,” she confides, before gleefully telling the story of how she told the Queen she was “our best brand, our best advocate”. “She just responded, ‘oh really?’” Trevelyan says, complete with impression of Her Majesty. “Oh, I just love her.”

Building “Brand Britain” is a key part of Trevelyan’s role as International Trade Secretary, although she says our national profile is already very strong. “This is the best job... It’s literally cheerleading for the UK’s goods and services, what is not to love?”

“We have some of the best services provision, creativity, and we





make some of the finest food and drink, engineering, in the world, everybody wants it. And in the work that DIT can now do, since Brexit and the freedoms that we have, we can open doors for all these businesses to find new homes.

"I get to go around, say 'now, I know you love our stuff and I know you buy it, but, actually, it could be really so much better.' Let's think about how, whether [that be] a free trade agreement (FTA) or a plethora of other new tools, to unlock those market barriers that are making it hard for British businesses to invest, and... how

foreign investment [can] come in and invest in the UK, in order to help us to grow our own economy."

Post-Brexit, international trade deals have had some bad headlines, particularly when it comes to food. Last month, Minette Batters, head of the National Farmers Union, told *The House* the government's lauded UK-Australia FTA "gave the most prized food market in the world over for nothing". However, Trevelyan insists it is a "very robust deal for farms," with three layers of safeguards.

"There isn't any great risk that a surge of shipments of Australian beef could turn up. If that were to happen – which I genuinely don't think it will; Australia is mostly sending ... its protein to China and the Indo Pacific where it gets really high prices – we've got these safeguards in place, which effectively can halt the market flows while everyone looks at whether there's unfair activity going on.

"There have been real concerns coming from the farming community and Australia was the first from-scratch deal we did so everybody didn't quite know what it was going to look like. This is the first time we've been able to do this in 50 years. No [imported] food is going to be sold in British shops that doesn't meet our food safety standards. It's just not. So no one should be worried about that."

Trevelyan also downplays concerns about undercutting. "The British love to eat British meat," she says – she tries to buy British whenever she can. "The British market for amazing British produce is strong and will continue to be strong."

As an adopted northerner, Trevelyan sees trade and exporting as being intrinsically tied into the levelling up agenda, ensuring businesses across the country are encouraged to export and create economic growth.

Trevelyan moved to Northumberland in 1996 after marrying her ex-husband. While she describes herself as "a helpful local person" in her local Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservative Association, her focus then was on building her career as an accountant, rather than politics.

Then David Cameron became leader in 2005. Michael Gove, who had just been elected – and who she knew from her time at Oxford Polytechnic while he was at the University (she used to go to the Oxford Union and listen to the debates) – sent Trevelyan a text saying it was their generation's turn and imploring her to stand.

"I said, 'Michael, I've got two small children. I'm in the north-east, I'm helping run two businesses'... but you can't say no to Michael, you never can," she says. "I thought I'd never get through the candidates' list. I don't know why I thought that."

When she did get through, she insisted she would stand only in the north-east, happy to run in a "no-hoper". She was selected as Berwick-upon-Tweed's candidate for the 2010 election; the incumbent Lib Dem MP, Sir Alan Beith, had held the seat since 1973, and she didn't get much help from CCHQ. After reducing Beith's majority from 8,632 to 2,690, he announced he would be standing down in 2015, and she took the seat in that election.

"Northumberland wasn't even on Whitehall's lips; it just didn't exist. One of my first challenges when I first got elected in 2015 was to say Berwick-upon-Tweed a lot," says Trevelyan, describing the focus the 2015 Tory intake managed to give rural policy as "really, really energising."

She recounts joking with Philip Hammond when he was chancellor

that the entire border with Scotland was now Tory after 2015. "He said, 'well, now all you need to do is work your way down and make the whole of the North blue'. And I said, 'alright, you're on!'"

Never given a ministerial role under Theresa May, her ascent under Boris Johnson has been rapid, if slightly erratic. Trevelyan was first appointed as a junior minister at the Ministry of Defence when Johnson moved into No 10 in July 2019, and then became secretary of state for international development the following February. Her department was subsumed into the Foreign Office just seven months later in September 2020, leading to her exiting the Cabinet. That November 2020, she was appointed UK International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency, and became minister for clean growth at the beginning of 2021. In September



2021, she re-entered the Cabinet in her current job.

Trevelyan is passionate about linking green growth in northern areas with trade and wants to encourage foreign investment into Britain's green agenda. "Clearly, you'd also want to export those brilliant cables, blades, services and skills [built in the UK] to other countries as well as being part of the big green revolution," she says. "Where you've got foreign investment into a business, you have better profitability, higher wage rates, and an energy to export again. So that means that there's this multiplier effect to having this cycle of real openness."

"We want to break down protectionist barriers and help the rest of the world see and trust in the value of free trade."

**"We want to break down protectionist barriers and help the rest of the world see and trust in the value of free trade"**

Trevelyan travelled heavily ahead of COP, and says it was "just extraordinary. Everywhere we went, they wanted more British, they wanted to be more connected. They were so excited that we were free to be the UK and they wanted to have stronger and close links. Pick any country, big, small, island state."

What about the United States? I ask. A deal has been on the government's wish-list for many years, but under President Joe Biden, negotiations for a federal deal haven't even started.

"Across the US, absolutely," she says. "I think the White House has this inward looking domestic, urgent agenda that Biden wants to bring to [fruition]. But across the US from businesses, business councils, governors at a state level, [there is] huge engagement... because, actually, when we get back to the FTA conversation, where

obviously quite lot of work was done with Trump's administration anyway, we will need all those voices to be in sync. It's turning it on its head effectively and doing all the groundwork first."

Priorities for this year include deals with Canada, Mexico, and India – a famously protectionist country when it comes to trade. In particular, some Tory backbenchers have been worried by the Indian government's demand for more visas for Indian nationals to study and work in the UK as part of any deal. However, Trevelyan plays a straight bat, saying that this doesn't sit within her remit: "Trade deals are about trade. Immigration issues are dealt with by the Home Office."

Another concern of Conservative backbenchers is imports from the Chinese region of Xinjiang, where there have been reports of forced labour camps for the persecuted Uyghur Muslims. The US has recently banned imports of goods from the region – will the UK be following suit?

"The Foreign Office obviously drives and leads on this front, and the Foreign Secretary and her [predecessor] have been incredibly robust on that," Trevelyan says. "There's a whole series of work going on and that continues. Businesses have a very strong series of responsibilities to demonstrate that they're not importing goods from places that are using forced labour. I am, where I'm responsible at the WTO [World Trade Organisation], doing a lot of work, particularly with the US, on those questions of forced labour more widely." She is "very proud" of British consumers, she says, who have a tendency to use their pounds to boycott unethical practices.

As we meet just a few hours ahead of the publication of the Sue Gray update on her investigation into parties in Downing Street, trade concerns are not the only matters occupying Tory MPs – so does

Trevelyan fancy a shot at the top job?

She laughs again. "Oh, no thank you. One hundred per cent definitely not. I'm very happy being third in the rankings of the *ConservativeHome* [net Cabinet satisfaction] polls, that works for me." A few days later it emerges that she has slipped to fourth place. It doesn't seem likely she'll mind too much. 🇬🇧





# PORT OF DOVER STILL DELIVERING THE GOODS FOR THE NATION

A port of strategic national importance, Dover is the UK's most important roll on-roll-off (ro-ro) freight port.

Its geographic advantage and the unmatched capacity, crossing speed and sailing frequency it provides as a result, make Dover highly resilient to temporary shocks. This is both in terms of its ability to recover from issues on the link itself, and its ability to step in and provide fast, frequent capacity when other ports are closed.

The Port of Dover supports businesses across the nation through the goods brought into and out of the UK 24/7.

## VALUE

- £144 billion of trade in goods
- £3 billion saving for British businesses and consumers compared to alternative routes
- £2.7 billion extra cost to divert just 10-20% of Dover's traffic in order to pay for additional ferries that would operate on longer and slower routes

## VOLUME

- 33% of all UK trade with the EU
- 31% of all HGVs transiting UK seaports
- 30% of all ro-ro ferry arrivals to the UK

## RESILIENCE

- The high frequency of sailings enables Dover to clear queues 18 times faster than competitor ports
- The frequency of departures from Dover allows UK manufacturers to maintain resilient and efficient supply chains
- If a UK container port is closed, ships can be redirected to northern European ports, and the goods brought into the UK via the Short Straits, which are 20% quicker and cheaper than the next best (ro-ro) route

## FUTURE BENEFITS

- Dover will be a vital link in the decarbonisation of the UK supply chain
- The carbon costs of using Dover will decline significantly while it will retain the benefits it offers businesses and consumers in terms of time, cost and resilience

## TO HELP KEEP DELIVERING

We've got through Brexit and kept going during Covid, but we need government support:

- To address looming threats to traffic fluidity, such as the EU Entry Exit System
- For new border control infrastructure
- For strategic road infrastructure
  - to maximise resilience (A2 dualling)
  - to support complementary investments (Lower Thames Crossing)
  - to support improved HGV parking facilities
- To drive net zero through Dover and the UK's critical just-in-time supply chain



# ORDERS, ORDERS

Top food critic **Tanya Gold** has eaten in some of the finest restaurants in the world. So *The House* asked her to run a taste test on Parliament's culinary offerings...

**T**he Terrace Cafeteria in the Palace of Westminster has wood-panelled walls and a fine plaster ceiling; ornamental chandeliers; an art collection; views of the Thames. It is one of the finest rooms in London, excepting the flooring, which is grey rug (in the dining room) competing with brown plastic (in the serving room), which is a face-off of tat screaming with self-confidence, like a duke with a Tesco's carrier bag.

I can, this restaurant preens, have a brown plastic floor, and no one will think less of me. They will think more of me, I am a caff-palace.

It smells of toast. This is a greasy spoon; a very mad and dissonant greasy spoon, because it was designed by Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin; sometimes, I think, for spite.

This palace built on marsh, which is falling apart for added charisma, is, as well as being beautiful and one of the most unsafe workplaces in Britain – it's the wiring – the most intense place I have found outside a Roman shrine.

I do not know how anyone can work, let alone eat here. Yet I will try, because I want to know whether to envy or pity our legislators in this matter. You can tell a lot about people from the way they eat.

The old palace had a caff called Bellamy's, run by a man called John Bellamy, and then by another man called John Bellamy. His pies were so fine that Pitt the Younger said on his deathbed: "I think I could eat one of Bellamy's pork pies." Perhaps he did eat one. Perhaps it was spin. But Bellamy's burnt down with the old palace in 1834, and, though there is still a Bellamy's at 1 Parliament Street, there are too many parliamentarians to feed there.

So I am here instead. Where else do you find crunchy nut cornflakes with Pugin tiles and museum-class art with non-artisanal yogurts? I think voters would be pleased to know that their adequate, sorry, full English breakfasts are replicated here. There is a system of segregation, which irritates me – signs indicate certain tables are reserved for MPs – but it is not food based. If it isn't bad, it isn't good either. There is a lifelessness to the egg, sausage, bacon. The toast is that comforting kind of squashy toast. It is, weirdly, as if for children or the very old, pre-buttered – or margerined? – for you. This is a working breakfast: a breakfast for alcoholics, and workaholics and people who have been up all night and need to eat something – pig fat – before they collapse.



I watch the terrace through bleary windows. On a sullen day like this, the idea of joy on the terrace is only a dream. I suppose it was worse during The Great Stink, when no one could eat. But there is a consolation inside, alongside the adequate sausages and the squashy toast: portraiture and landscape.

This is a palace, and, like all palaces, it worships itself. That is the point of it. And so, no matter how dismal and forgotten the corridor, there will be a painting of part of the palace, or another part, or both parts, or some man who worked here and did something, or nothing, on the wall. There will be a view. In the Terrace Cafeteria the palace shows its family photographs. Itself. Here is me in 1300; in 1500; in 1900. This is me in the Great Freeze of 1895. This is me in ruins.

And so, at last, because I have always considered the palace a very unsuitable place for a modern legislature, I understand why they stay, and do not do the sensible thing and just move out, and let it fall into the Thames. It is because it makes no sense: it is the self-confidence of the British ruling class. The food, at least in this cafeteria, brings them down to earth. If this were anything other than a normal greasy spoon, no one could morally survive it. It's not often I *call toast* essential to the soul, but this is.

**"I suppose it was worse during The Great Stink, when no one could eat"**

Lunch is in a restaurant called The Adjournment in Portcullis House. This is an absurd name even for a restaurant, and it offers, "contemporary casual dining featuring classic favourites and modern dishes". As ever, I imagine the counter PR babble, which would offer, "ancient formal dining featuring unknown dishes that people hate from the past". The name is laconic, and it has to be. It is up against The Debate (sounds angry and offers an "extensive range of snack items") and the Despatch Box, which sells paninis, and sounds worse. As if you could eat a panini at the despatch box, or anything. I wonder what names were rejected before they came to The Adjournment. I ponder The Compromise (Italian?) The Resignation (cake?)

The Adjournment has as little in common with Pugin's thrilling working-class-caff-palace as wine with dust. It does have an identity, but it is vapid, surely by design. It looks like a shed made of Lego, with added glass. The art is a rug called Wall Hanging by Allegra Hicks. (After bothering to think up The Adjournment, I think they gave up). It is red squiggles on grey. The carpet is grey, though fine; the chairs are red and spindly; the tables are good quality wood. We could

## JERKING DELICIOUS

**It is beloved by all those working in Westminster and even has its own Twitter handle. But just what makes Parliament's jerk chicken so tasty? Alain Tolhurst reports**

As a place that runs on conflict, there isn't much people in Parliament agree on – in fact, just about the only consensus in Westminster these days is how good the jerk chicken is in the estate's many restaurants.

Parliament's catering staff work hard to come up with new ways of spicing up lunch for the thousands of passholders who take their meals in SW1 every day, but of all the many tasty meals on offer, jerk chicken is the one MPs, peers, staffers, journalists and everyone else keep coming back to.

Sous chef Marvin Beckles came up with the jerk recipe two decades ago; he says it is the warm and welcoming flavours that keep drawing people back.

"You feel like it does transport you, like you could be on a beach somewhere," Beckles told *The House*, revealing that Parliament's

passholders and guests work their way through more than 18,000 servings a year of both the chicken and its equally popular spin-off, jerk pork.

The catering department did try a fish version a few years ago, but it proved less popular. However, the vegetarian take on jerk, and jerk chicken wraps with plantain are both popular choices. There was even a memorable occasion when jerk duck made it on to the menu.

Beckles says that when Portcullis House opened at the turn of the century it brought with it a younger generation, and jerk was a way to cater to diners comfortable with the street food markets and global cuisine available elsewhere in the capital.

Still a mainstay in PCH, Strangers, the River Restaurant and Bellamy's, people are constantly asking for the recipe to make at home. A precious set of copies which were handed

out briefly a few years ago are now guarded like first edition manuscripts.

Beckles admits making the same thing week after week can get "a little tedious," but the team "enjoy that people are enjoying it," adding: "I know people that have travelled from Millbank and gone to Bellamy's just because jerk has been on."

The dish is the only food available in Parliament that has its own

Twitter account –

@SpeakerJerkow – and although the pandemic has meant only sporadic alerts, in the past it proved a valuable service, letting enthusiasts know when jerk was available and where. Followers include what

seems to be half the lobby as well as a number of special advisers, researchers, officials and several MPs. Minister Paul Scully is known to be a devotee.

"Are you serious?" Beckles says when asked about the Twitter tribute. "I might need to get my jerk wrap onto that alert!" 🍗





be in IKEA, or the John Lewis café on the King's Road; we have moved up a class from the mad caff. We are now in middle class good taste/no taste land and that is how it should be. It's a representative legislature, after all.

It is brasserie food for brasserie people, and it is good, apart from the mushroom soup. Ideally, this should have identifiable pieces of mushroom bobbing in a paleish liquid. It's reassuring, and it allows you to know it is mushroom soup, and not some foul imposter. This mushroom soup doesn't. It is ground down, as if by a maniac, to a near black swamp of used-to-be-mushroom-but-that-was-then. You don't always need to be quite so explicit about the fact you are destroying food.

The steak frites, though, are superb, particularly the frites. It's almost impossible to cook a perfect steak because it is so easy. That's the way. There are perhaps five restaurants in London where you can get an excellent steak – try Beast and Hawksmoor Guildhall – and it would be terrible if this was one of them. But it's fine and the frites are as good as frites can be, and served in a gilded cup, as they are at The Wolseley, whose food, I suspect, The Adjournment is grasping towards. The chicken caesar salad is likewise very fine. It's a good and utterly soulless restaurant, and that is just what it needs to be. One cannot gaze forever at the sun. Though I don't think I could ever get used to eating under a screen which said: "Subsidy Control Committee". The charming female MP I am with worries that the food in the palace is designed to make people fat. That may be true, but I think it anchors them to this world.

I eat dinner in the Peers' Dining Room. I like the Lords because they work hard – the ones who turn up anyway – and they don't exist for the *News at Ten* because *News at Ten* isn't interested in them. They are allowed to be idiosyncratic, in the way the Commons aren't. I also like them because Pugin dumped all the gold at this end of the palace and the peers, therefore, submit to living inside what is essentially a dead madman's Catholicism. I don't think the people who work here are aware of the intensity of this building. It crawls though me, like a spell.

I am not a member of a gentleman's club so I cannot



Portcullis House

**"I don't think I could ever get used to eating under a screen which said: 'Subsidy Control Committee'"**



The Peers' Dining Room



House of Lords Terrace

tell you if it is just like dining inside a gentleman's club. But I am sure it is. I think it is the original gentleman's club. The walls are a fanatic yellow. The carpets look like they could, if they wished, hurt you. The chairs are red, to match the chamber. (I love this. The caff had it too, in green). The windows should come with an exclamation mark, but this is an original dining room; it has never been anything else. I watch a peer come in and be seated next to the last peer who came in, to discourage factionalism, or bullying, or megalomania. They mostly look tired. Uneasy is the head.

"Mouse!" screams a peer, for my benefit. The tourists must see the attractions: the paintings; the peerage; the mice. I like the mouse. I should like to see its home, its comforts, its babies. The building is alive.

I would say it is Rules – my favourite restaurant in the in world – with foreign parts. (Leftists would call it "colonisation" but it isn't. It's *tribute*). I would serve just dumplings and golden syrup pudding and cow if it were my decision – just like Rules, my favourite restaurant in the world – but I wonder if peers rejected it because it is what people expect them to eat, so they don't.

We begin with smoked salmon. It is very good smoked salmon but, in the way of aristocracy, it seems wary of seeming to be too good at being smoked salmon, so it tries to fail a little to be polite. This is a convoluted way of saying: this smoked salmon doesn't need pickles, or dill. Then we have the Cotswold chicken, which does its best under the circumstances. The vegetables are an amazing array, as if prepared by a person who frets about vitamins all its waking hours. Pudding is a honey tart, and like most tarts, it is so much better than it needs to be, but pastry chefs are special.

And, so, like frogs in boiling water – that is, they do not know it, because they eat here every day – the peers have, in my definition, a very good restaurant, which is a restaurant that knows what it is for. It's a *themed* restaurant, like the Rainforest Café or the weird pop-up Cadbury's Crème Egg café that flowered in Soho, was mobbed, and disappeared. It's a restaurant that outsiders would appreciate far more than the people who eat here, and that seems to me a wonderful kind of justice. 🍷



**Victoria Prentis**

Conservative MP for Banbury, and minister of state for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## I want us to start a national conversation about food

**W**e have great opportunities before us. Our departure from the Common Agricultural Policy has allowed us to put in place a whole new system of support for farmers and growers. We were clear in our manifesto that we want people at home and abroad to be lining up to buy British. We will be launching our food white paper, and our independent trade policy will open up new opportunities for UK food producers and manufacturers.

During the pandemic, the food sector has gone above and beyond. In what has been the greatest health challenge this country has faced in our lifetime, those who provide our food have worked around the clock to keep the nation fed – in our fields, our fish markets, processing plants, factories, wholesalers, stores, takeaways, and all those moving goods around the country and to our homes. The pandemic has also highlighted the vital role that farmers and food manufacturers have to play in delivering our food security.

**“With our upcoming white paper, we have the opportunity to rethink the food system to make sure everyone has access to high-quality, nutritious and sustainable food”**

The food sector is also central when it comes to the government’s “levelling up” agenda. Food and drink is the biggest manufacturing sector in the UK – bigger than the automotive and aerospace industries combined. And it is more evenly dispersed across the country.

Food manufacturers provide employment, they offer apprenticeships and opportunities for the next generation, they invest in research and development, and they give local areas a real sense of identity.

There are often misconceptions about what goes on behind the factory door, but the jobs available are often highly-skilled, technical and offer good opportunities for progression.

From Melton Mowbray pork pies to Wensleydale cheese, Cornish clotted cream, Welsh salt marsh lamb, and Scottish salmon, we have so many fantastic food manufacturers. I am really looking forward to getting out and about at the agricultural shows this year, meeting more small businesses and talking to them about

the opportunities ahead – and of course eating their products.

We want to boost UK agri-food exports and showcase our fantastic produce around the world. We have already announced we are adding eight new agri-food attachés in priority markets to help secure access for a great range of products. They will cover the US, India and the Asia-Pacific region, among others.

At home, I am very much on a mission to ensure we are encouraging people to buy British. With our upcoming white paper, we have the opportunity to rethink the food system to



make sure everyone has access to high-quality, nutritious and sustainable food. There are some challenging issues to grapple with, including public procurement, and the growing interest of consumers in the environment.

During the pandemic, people became very aware of supply chains, where their food comes from, and how it is produced. Television programmes such as *Clarkson's Farm*, which broke records for Amazon Prime Video when it began a year ago, have inspired a renewed interest in farming and how we grow our food.

It's fair to say there are exciting times ahead and our conversation about food is only just beginning. 🌱





**POLITICAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

# Ready for a renewed focus on policy

By Nick Winning – Head of Dods  
Political Intelligence UK & EU

One can only wonder what Charles Dod, the Irish journalist who founded the Dods Parliamentary Companion in 1832, would have thought of “partygate”. As a faithful recorder of parliamentary personnel and business, he may not have been surprised the scandal has commanded the attention of Westminster, overshadowing discussion on the serious issues facing the country at large. But he would probably have known that while the atmosphere has been febrile, the page will turn. And once the furore has passed, we can expect the government to embark on a renewed drive to address the pressing policy issues the UK faces.

The sooner that happens the better for voters, many of whom are too busy to have more than a passing interest in the who's who, whys and wherefores of politics and just want the government to get on with making life better. The reports of parties in the garden of 10 Downing Street may have grabbed the headlines, but they have not obscured the need for the government to tackle the immediate and longstanding challenges the UK faces. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's levelling up agenda remains a slogan in search of a policy. The worst of the pandemic may have passed, but it has left record backlogs on the NHS and in the justice system in its wake. The nation faces a cost-of-living squeeze fueled by a stratospheric rise in gas prices which has hit at a time policymakers need to find a consensus for how to meet net zero targets. And on foreign policy, Brexit has disrupted business and relations with the UK's largest trade partner with no notable upside, while Russia tests the West's resolve and unity.

The sooner the government tackles these issues the busier we will also be at the Political Intelligence division of Dods, the company named after Dod which continues to publish the Parliamentary Companion—the most respected guide to the people and institutions in UK politics—as well as The House, PoliticsHome and The Parliament Magazine out of



Brussels. Dods Political Intelligence provides clients—from multinational health companies to small charities—with accurate and impartial information, insight, and research on the latest policy developments in the UK and European Union. Our clients trust us to be their eyes and ears in legislatures, filtering myriad political sources for the information on policy that is important to them, so they can focus on their strategy.

We are investing further in our Political Intelligence service, launching a new state-of-the-art content delivery platform with enhanced search capabilities and functionality. To mark the launch of the new platform we have published a State of Play report, including a snapshot poll of Members of Parliament on a range of issues as well as policy analysis provided by our UK and EU political consultants based in London and Brussels.

The research found that although more than two thirds of the lawmakers who responded, rated Boris Johnson's performance as 'very bad' or 'bad', his positive rating remains on a par with Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. It also shows that more than half do not feel confident the world will change course to avert the worst possible outcomes of climate change, and that possibly, for every MP who thinks the UK will benefit long-term from Brexit there is another who believes neither the UK or EU stand to gain.

The analysis produced by the Political Intelligence consultants examines the outlook in four key areas including health policy and living with Covid, the climate and energy challenges ahead in the wake of COP26, transport's twin challenge of coronavirus and net zero, and how Brexit could undermine the "Global Britain" agenda.

Our investment in a new content delivery platform represents our determination to continue providing customers with the best possible Political Intelligence service available. It also represents Dods' enduring commitment, since the printing of the first Parliamentary Companion 190 years ago, to being a linchpin in the transfer of impartial and dependable information about politics and policy to society. So, when UK policymakers get back to the business of making policy, we will be ready – and so will our clients.



**Scan to  
download  
the report**



# EAT

As **Henry Dimbleby** awaits a formal response to his National Food Strategy report, the government's food tsar tells **John Johnston** why state action is crucial if Britain is to break the damaging junk food cycle and reverse the constant rise in obesity figures



**A**s a former chef, management consultant, and co-founder of the hugely successful Leon restaurant chain, Henry Dimbleby may seem like an obvious choice to lead the government's independent National Food Strategy. Less obvious is why Dimbleby, with his demanding business career, would choose to devote time to producing a review which would undoubtedly lead to personal criticism and, as with any government-ordered report, face the very real risk of it being left to gather dust on a minister's desk.

Dimbleby doesn't hesitate: "When I was asked to do it, I felt it was the opportunity to do something that I really, properly, felt was critical to the continuation of decent civilisation."

Having launched Leon as a "selfish brand" aimed at increasing access to food which was both enjoyable and healthy, Dimbleby says he was given an insight into the contribution of the food system and how it sits at the centre of "environmental destruction and the destruction of health".

"I've seen it first-hand. It was a chance to change that," he adds.

Published in two parts, the strategy takes a field-to-fork view of the UK's relationship with food, addressing issues such as climate change, obesity, and poverty. The ambitious recommendations include a new salt and sugar tax, extending access to school meals, introducing new carbon emission labelling, and even prescribing vegetables through GPs.

While ministers are yet to formally respond to the proposals, which were delivered in June 2020, Dimbleby says he is "pretty relaxed" about the delay, making it clear he believes the evidence he has gathered and the support he has garnered from industry will help overcome the squeamishness that often plagues government attempts to avoid the charge of "nanny state" interventionism.

"There are people who think you should just go into a report and say the most radical things you can imagine that will be politically impossible in the hope that, if you say we need to go to the moon, then they might get halfway there.

"But I saw my job as trying to work out how the system worked,

# HIS

# WORDS

what would fix it, and how politically you get across the line."

To achieve that, Dimbleby brought companies onboard with his proposals ahead of publication, with some writing to the Prime Minister privately and calling for some aspects, such as mandatory reporting and even new taxes, to be brought in across the industry.

"They all know it's coming, inside the business," he adds. "They will say that privately, too. This is the junk food cycle and it's not just the customers that are stuck in it; it's the businesses too. And as we said, these people don't wake up every morning thinking: 'how can I make people ill and make children fat?' They wake up thinking: 'what can I sell to people that they'll enjoy and make us more money than our competitors?'"

Shifting away from some of the well-worn approaches to tackling obesity, Dimbleby hopes taking a more holistic approach that encompasses the wider food environment will help reverse the constant rise in obesity figures. And that includes government intervention.

"I think almost everyone knows [an individual approach] was wishful thinking. In the centre of government, in the debate, there's a kind of realisation now that, 'S\*\*t, this isn't going to change unless we intervene.'"

He adds: "This was about how we intervene in the most effective and politically-acceptable way. The idea that we can create an app and have communications that persuade people to eat more healthily and that is going to solve this, I don't think is seriously believed by anyone anymore."

Coming as the battle over free school meals was raging in the Commons, support for the strategy also received a boost from England football star Marcus Rashford who, having just forced the government into a series of U-turns, publicly threw his support behind Dimbleby's plans to expand access to high-quality food to school children, measures he believes will tackle both food poverty and the increase in childhood obesity.

"I thought his impact was fantastic. Why it was so powerful is because it linked the data with reality and people who are, or who have been brought up, in that situation," Dimbleby says. "They very rarely have a voice, and to have someone come from a family where food was not secure, explaining it as eloquently and as apolitically and as straightforwardly as he was, I think made a huge difference."

"In any policy, it is the combination of facts and numbers and dates, and stories and narratives that actually creates change. His intervention was critical in that area."

"It also helped at the time [that] we all knew people, even people who were affluent knew people, who had lost their jobs or were at risk of losing their jobs. Generally understanding [the] narrative that people can find themselves on the outskirts

of society, for quite random reasons, unconnected to hard work [or] merit. There was this idea of, 'There but for the grace of God go I'. That was quite strong in 2020."

Eton and Oxford-educated, Dimbleby's background is more aligned with that of Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg than of those forced to use foodbanks, and while he believes there is "desire" among government to better empathise with those in food poverty, he encourages all ministers to witness first-hand their experiences before deciding on policies that will impact them.

"You have to go and see it. The first session I did at a foodbank, I sat for a day to sign people in. You do a kind of triage for people at a foodbank, and I was signing people in and asking them

various questions about how they got there," he says.

"Certainly, the large majority are people who have had something go wrong, and often they bounce back. Often, they fall into that crack for six months, or a year. There is a big challenge in terms of the people who are falling into that food insecure area."

"I don't think you can really have great policy responses unless you have that kind of instinctive understanding."

Inevitably, Dimbleby's recommendations have faced accusations of being too interventionist, or claims they will increase the average shopping bill. Conservative MP for Rutland and Melton, Alicia Kearns, targeted his salt reformulation plans, saying anything which could damage her beloved Stilton would not be countenanced by anyone from the villages around Melton Mowbray, where the cheese is made.

Other MPs may also leap to the defence of local delicacies as the government's response looms. But Dimbleby remains level-headed, saying even the Prime Minister's apparent rejection of one of his key recommendations just moments after his report was published – Johnson suggested he was "not attracted" to extra taxes on sugar and salt that would impact "hard-working people" – did little to knock his confidence.

"I don't personally find it frustrating. Friends ask me, 'How do you put up with this?' But that is part of the scene and if

you are asked to do one of these things, unless you are very naive, you know that is going to be part of it."

"They ask if I was frustrated when Boris was pounced on with a question on the first day and he responded saying he wasn't in favour of more taxes on hard-working people. I just thought: 'well, no, because nobody is.'"

And what of the future of the review? As Mr Johnson's leadership came under pressure over parties in Downing Street during lockdown, there were reports that he may be prepared to jettison the review in order to appease recalcitrant backbench MPs.

It remains to be seen whether Dimbleby's hard work and patience will count for anything. 🍷

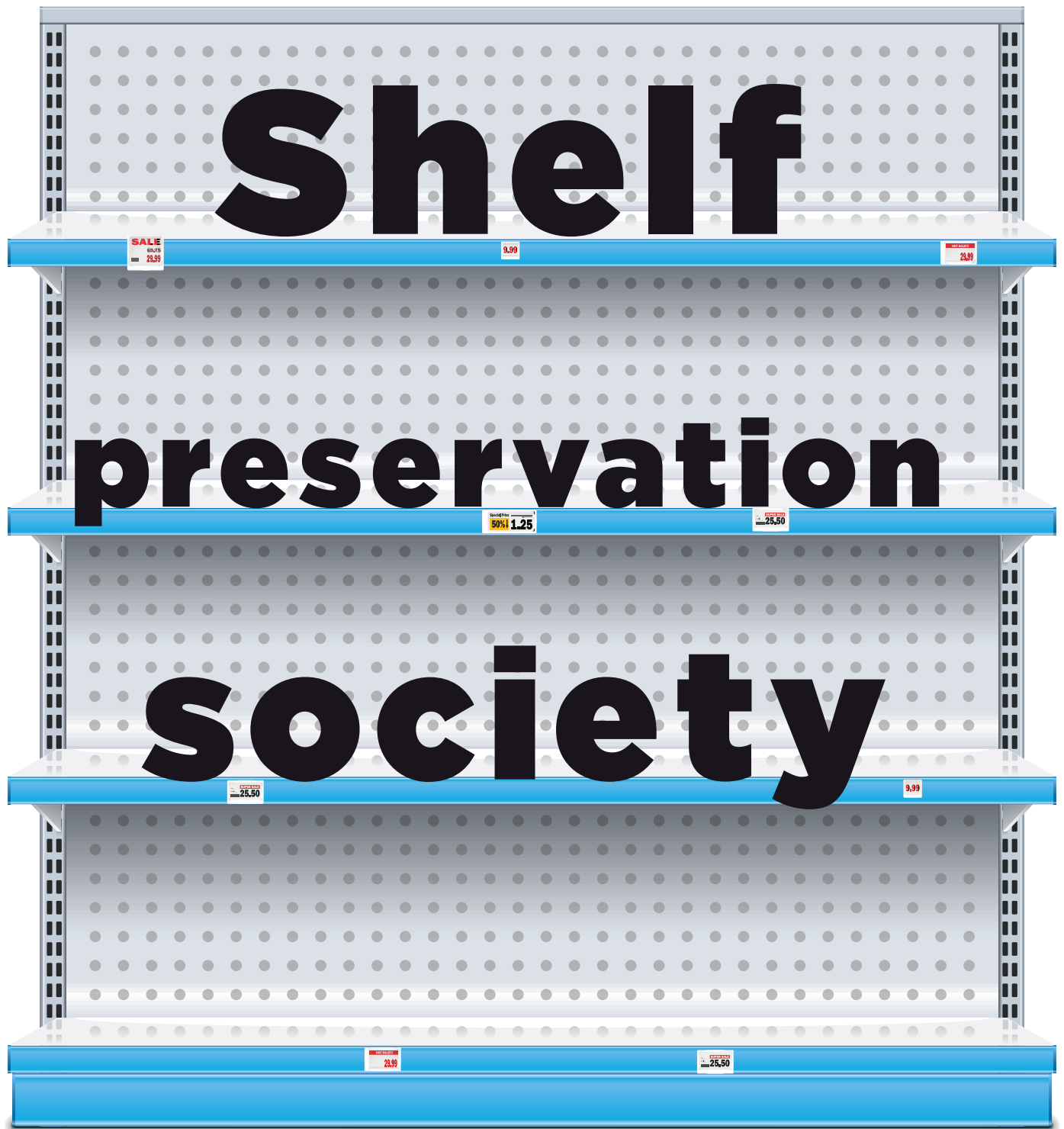
### **"This was about how we intervene in the most effective and politically-acceptable way"**



2014 Then-mayor of London Boris Johnson and Henry Dimbleby



If Britain's supermarkets are to remain well-stocked, the government must address the long-term challenges facing the supply chain. From labour shortages to Brexit bureaucracy, there are gaps in the system that puts food on the table, writes **Adam Payne**



**T**he crisis facing supply chains late last year was so serious that Boris Johnson brought in Sir David Lewis, a former CEO of Tesco, to be his emergency tsar, with a mission to bang heads together and get food back on supermarket shelves.

The food and drink industry had been badly hit. Headlines appeared almost daily about household names such as McDonald's, Greggs, and Nando's, as well as the major supermarkets, running out of items.

The disruption, which led to a flood of images on social media of empty shelves, was blamed primarily on chronic labour shortages: a combination of Covid and stricter immigration rules brought in after Brexit exacerbating a dearth of lorry drivers in the UK, on top of insufficient numbers of pickers, butchers, warehouse workers, and other staff in the supply chain.

Lewis, whose contract has now expired, got to work in early October – and in earnest.

He worked with the industry to tackle short-term problems so that food and drink was able to reach supermarkets and hospitality businesses, while helping the government better prepare supply chains for crises in the future.

More than 100 businesses spanning 14 sectors shared information with Lewis, which was then relayed to the Prime Minister and used to inform policy.

Johnson also asked Stephen Barclay, as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster his ministerial trouble-shooter-in-chief, to work alongside the former Tesco boss to seek out quick solutions.

Whitehall figures say their actions successfully abated disruption and left the government better equipped to help supply chains be more resilient going forward.

Speaking to *The House*, Barclay says the government took 32 actions to keep supply chains moving and shore them up in the long term, including putting £34m towards HGV "skills bootcamps" which are expected to train more than 11,000 lorry drivers. "There are still challenges ahead – particularly from the impact of Omicron on global trade – but we will ensure that our logistics sector has all the support it needs," he says.

A senior official adds the government is now "better prepared for future flare ups", and in "a better situation in terms of understanding this issue better and having the info we need".

But the issues facing food and drink supply chains haven't disappeared – far from it.

Take labour shortages: while they may no longer top the news bulletins, they remain a huge problem for the food and drink industry. Towards the end of 2021, the Food & Drink Federation (FDF) estimated the industry was around half a million short of the workers it needed.

The meat sector has been among the most adversely impacted, with shortfalls in staff, in the past often recruited from EU countries, causing slowdowns in production.

Nick Allen, CEO of the British Meat Processors Association, tells *The House*: "The problems haven't gone away. We're still very short of workers and we're still very concerned about where they are going to come from."

Allen adds there are currently more job vacancies than people ready to fill them, meaning firms "are pinching one another's staff".

This is forcing under-staffed processors to prioritise high-volume, simpler cuts, Allen says, leading to the sacrifice of more up-market products requiring greater time and work, like meat with fat removed or with greater emphasis on presentation, resulting in diminished consumer choice.

"Colleagues are coping by reducing product lines," he says. "Ultimately, that means there is less choice and if you go into a supermarket now, it's like going back to the 1990s."

In the autumn, ministers gave in to industry pressure and set up short-term visa schemes for overseas butchers and poultry workers, designed to plug gaps in the labour force in time for the busy Christmas period.

The Home Office refused to disclose how many visas had been issued through the schemes, with the department telling *The House* the figures would be published in the next quarterly immigration statistics report, due later this month. However, Allen says that, so far, the impact on his sector has been "marginal".

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**"If you go into a supermarket now, it's like going back to the 1990s"**

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Then, naturally, there is the B-word.

This year, having delayed several times, the government is finally introducing checks on goods arriving from the European Union – a new world of bureaucracy for importers necessitated by leaving the bloc's single market and customs union. Food and drink businesses will be particularly impacted by the new friction. The UK gets around two-thirds of its fruit and vegetables from the continent, for example, along with about 60 per cent of its cheese.

Ministers decided to bring in this plethora of new paperwork in stages, with the most onerous checks coming later in the year.

The government reached the end of last month feeling cautiously optimistic about how traders had adapted to the first tranche of checks introduced on 1 January.

A senior Defra source said warnings of major disruption to food and drink supply chains had not materialised, and that systems designed by government in preparation for the consequences of Brexit had stood up to the test.

FDF data, shared exclusively with *The House*, found low levels of disruption last month, with a very small decrease (one per cent) in food and drink brought in from EU countries by businesses which responded to the survey.

However, ministers shouldn't get too carried away with those early signs, according to industry leaders, who say many food and drink companies simply didn't bother attempting to import at the start of 2022.





## “There’s now an ever-present risk of disruption in which certain products don’t get through”

“What we saw in the first few weeks of the year was businesses deciding to stop moving goods while they wait and see how the new systems stand up,” explains the FDF’s Dominic Goudie. “We’re waiting for the first weeks of February, when we expect trade volumes to pick up, to see how smaller, less-prepared food and drink businesses cope”.

Shane Brennan, chief executive of the Cold Chain Federation, says the UK’s significantly looser trading links with the EU will have “massive structural implications” for the food and drink industry, which ultimately will mean less choice for shoppers in the long term.

“Supermarkets are simplifying their ranges,” he says.

“Fundamentally, you can no longer treat suppliers in northern France like you do a supplier in the UK, so inevitably there’ll be less trade with that source. This, in turn, means there’ll be a smaller range of products.”

For some businesses, according to Goudie, this new reality will make it too complex and expensive to continue importing “high-risk” food from the EU like meat, fish, eggs, and dairy goods, forcing them to give up on that trade.



He adds that random gaps will continue to appear on supermarket shelves because the challenges facing the supply chain will be long-lasting: “There’s now an ever-present risk of disruption in which certain products don’t get through.”

A senior government official rejects this claim, telling *The House*: “Some items might have been missing from shelves in the run-up to Christmas, but industry has invested massively in their supply chains and will see a way through any short-term challenges.”

Nick Thomas-Symonds, the shadow secretary of state for international trade, says a Labour government would ease the strain on food and drink businesses by forming closer ties with the bloc: “A Labour government would make Brexit work by negotiating a bespoke UK-EU veterinary agreement to cut red tape for our food and agricultural industries.”

# Government should Back British PPE and Protect the NHS Frontline



**T**he fragility of the UK's PPE manufacturing capabilities and supply chains was highlighted during the coronavirus pandemic, with a worldwide surge in protectionist trade measures combined with just-in-time supply chains causing global logistics to buckle under unprecedented circumstances. During the pandemic, the UK government alone spent £15 billion on approximately 32 billion items of PPE, purchasing vital PPE products at inflated prices and flying them into the UK.

Critical supplies of PPE were often either unavailable or of sub-standard quality due to global demand and supply chain challenges. The number of sub-standard masks remains high – over 2 million since January 2021. Former Health Minister, Lord Bethell revealed in September 2021 that 1.9 billion items of PPE with an estimated value of £2.8 billion were classed as 'do not supply'.

In the UK, **less than 1% of PPE used by doctors and nurses during the pandemic was produced here in the UK**, despite many companies stepping up to the challenge to deliver PPE for the Government.

We are witnessing a global shift on domestic capabilities as countries take steps to ensure PPE production and access to raw materials moves closer to home. It's crucial that the UK government turns its attentions to security of supply and establishing a resilient supply chain of high-quality UK-manufactured PPE.

Government must not jeopardise the NHS's ability to treat people, deal with this or other crises effectively, whilst safeguarding our healthcare professionals. For this reason alone, we must future-proof domestic supply chains and provide support for domestic producers to be able to rapidly manufacture high-quality PPE in response to both ongoing needs and those of a crisis.

The case has been proven and benefits clear. The pandemic has evidenced that our domestic manufacturers have the skills, the expertise, the capability and commitment to deliver. In parallel, local manufacturing of PPE will foster innovation, drive R&D and boost jobs.

PPE procurement must not be centred on the 'cheapest is best' but UK producers should receive a significant allocation when awarding supply contracts. This will provide confidence to PPE manufacturers to establish and maintain onshore manufacturing facilities, invest in proven or emerging PPE technologies and products, and to plan for the long-term.

In order to support the Government, Medicom has come together with other PPE manufacturers, business organisations and healthcare professionals as 'Back British PPE' with five objectives:

**1. Denote PPE as Critical National Infrastructure:** enact policies that grant special status to UK manufacturers and supply chains producing masks, gloves and gowns.

**2. 'Go global, stay local':** ensure domestic PPE manufacturers are given the optimal environment to create jobs and drive R&D.

**3. Learn from other supply chains:** share best practice on UK PPE manufacturing and innovation.

**4. Ring-fence the PPE budget:** secure the necessary funds so our NHS can buy crucial items at an affordable price to protect our medical professionals.

**5. Constitute an NHS PPE Taskforce:** guarantee that medical professionals and manufacturers can clearly communicate their needs to government.

"The experience and expertise we've gained from 45 years of PPE manufacturing tells us that the UK government has a massive opportunity to develop a much more resilient PPE approach as they focus on the post-pandemic economic recovery. As UK manufacturers, we are best positioned and prepared to rapidly scale-up or scale-down production to adapt to ever changing needs.

It's often assumed that PPE manufactured in the UK can't compete with cheaper imports. This is a myth and we can compete on many levels – most importantly safety, quality, sustainability and product lifecycle - 5 years for CE produced PPE vs 2 years for PPE produced in Asia. Government must actively Back British PPE."

## Hugues Bourgeois, Managing Director, Medicom Healthpro UK

Medicom® Group is one of the world's leading manufacturers of high-quality single-use preventative and infection control products for the medical, dental and hygiene industries. With over 45 years' experience in mask manufacture, they have nine fully owned sites, including one here in the UK, and sell in over 95 countries.

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# My favourite pub

Few institutions are as universally cherished as the great British pub. Boozers serve as community hubs, sanctuaries to unwind and the perfect place let your hair down. While Westminster has its fair share of beloved drinkeries, *The House* wanted to shine a light on some of the wonderful hostelries that lie beyond SW1. Here, parliamentarians tell us about their favourite local, and why it is special to them. Compiled by **Noa Hoffman** and **Georgina Bailey**





**Viscount Thurso**  
Liberal Democrat peer

### **The Ulbster Arms, Halkirk, Caithness**

**I**n best parliamentary style I must declare an interest. From 1995 to 2009 I owned this wonderful hotel and pub. It is also named after the family – Sinclair of Ulbster. So I probably should have chosen somewhere else, but under its new ownership it has become such a great place it deserves nomination.

It is the heart of the community. You will find all the many characters in the village there at some point in the week. It hosts the senior citizens' lunch club and it is from the Ulbster that the parade launching the annual Halkirk Highland Games (one of the best on the professional circuit) starts.

It is where all the fishermen who fish the river Thurso stay, and the pictures on display show great catches, flies, and "well kent characters".

But a pub, however atmospheric, is only as good as its offering. The Ulbster does great local produce well and without frills. The beer is good, and the wines interesting. The service is friendly and, as they say in the north, the craic first rate. In summary, friendly faces of fellow guests and staff, a warm welcome, good local food, and all at the heart of the community.



**Matt Vickers**  
Conservative MP for Stockton South

### **The Parkwood, Hartburn**

**A**s an MP, choosing your favourite anything in your constituency is always a dangerous game. I am sure that I will be making a rod for my own back by naming one specific pub, so I must preface this by saying that Stockton South has an incredible selection of quality boozers.

From The Masham to The Roundel, The Black Bull and The Fairfield, one thing I always make sure of is that canvassers, campaigners and constituency staff alike are well acquainted with the top-class watering holes on offer.



But one pub stands out as my personal favourite. It's fair to say that I am a regular at The Parkwood in Hartburn, which doubles up as a hotel which Ann Widdecombe recently bestowed with her nod of approval after enjoying a glass of Courvoisier at the bar.

The Parkwood is full of character. Its quaint fireplace and clean, traditional decor give it the atmosphere of a proper local. But nothing gives it more character than its owner, Jason, whose passion for his pub is evident. Every guest is his priority and regulars are treated with the respect they deserve. In my opinion, the personal touch Jason adds to The Parkwood just about edges it ahead of its competitors and always keeps me looking forward to my next visit.



**Charlotte Nichols**  
Labour MP for Warrington North

### **The Albion, Warrington**

**W**arrington North has a fantastic range of pubs, from CAMRA-award winning real-ale pubs like The Pack Horse Inn in Culcheth, to family-friendly community pubs like The Club in Burtonwood, pubs with a rowdy karaoke on a Friday like The Famous King and Queen in Padgate, to pubs to enjoy a pint with the match like the Hoop and Mallet in Callands – so it very much depends on what you're looking for, as we've really got it all!

I live in Orford, which has a fine selection around Orford Lane, but my personal favourite has got to be The Albion, not only because it's my local, has a good range of ales on (including from local Warrington breweries like 4T's) and for a good price – but because it is one of the centres of our community. The regulars are proper characters and all pitched in to keep the community connected and supported throughout the pandemic, as well as doing lots of events to help raise money for charity, and regular live music which helps support our thriving local music scene. You're always guaranteed a warm welcome, and Dave's "Walking Taxi" can help anyone that needs it to get home safely!





**Baroness Smith  
of Basildon**

Labour peer and  
shadow leader

of the House of Lords

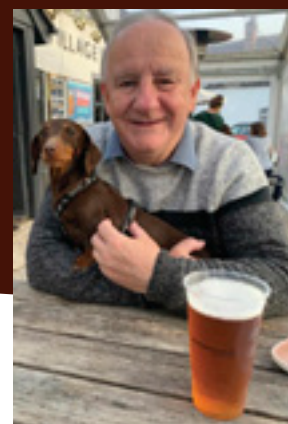
**The Waverley, Bognor Regis**

It's surprising that even when you live close to the sea, there are so few places where you can sit out and just watch the waves or the sun shimmering on the water. That partly explains the attraction and affection of my favourite pub in Bognor Regis, The Waverley. Located on a corner between a park and the promenade, there's nothing more relaxing than enjoying a drink with friends as you look towards the sea.

Throughout the seasons, rain or shine, it's where community groups are welcomed (including the ukulele players!) and during the day friends catch up for a coffee – and there's always the seaside favourite of fish and chips on the menu. Pre-pandemic, the music nights were always popular and who couldn't get into the festive spirit listening to *White Christmas* from a local singing group? My favourite time is early summer on arriving home from Westminster late on a Thursday to walk the 10 minutes or so from home, for a last drink, watching the sun set while breathing in the sea air. With sociable, friendly staff, a welcoming atmosphere and a great selection of gin, what more could I want?



**“One of the things I missed during lockdown was the sense of community spirit that British pubs provide in abundance, which in addition to a good evening out has a particularly positive effect on mental health as well”**



**Laurence Robertson**

Conservative MP  
for Tewkesbury

**Can't decide!**

Having been an MP for nearly 25 years I've frequented a great many excellent pubs in the constituency of Tewkesbury, so it would be far too difficult to single one out! Typically, I enjoy those which source their beers and ales locally, as I think it's really important to encourage and support local production wherever possible. I am also incredibly fortunate that Gloucestershire produces some of the best ales in the country.

One of the things I missed during lockdown was the sense of community spirit that British pubs provide in abundance, which in addition to a good evening out has a particularly positive effect on mental health as well. The cheerful and convivial atmosphere found at many traditional British pubs is something that is hard to rival and even harder to surpass, and I immensely enjoy speaking to constituents about both local and national issues over an IPA in pubs across Tewkesbury.

Since the end of lockdown, I have been trying to get out there and visit local businesses in order to hear concerns and see what more the government can do in terms of support. The hospitality sector has, unfortunately, been hit quite hard over the last few years but as a long-time pub enthusiast I will continue to push their case in Parliament and support one of the nation's favourite institutions! 🍺

## Will ministers have the stomach to tell us to eat less meat in their overdue Food Strategy white paper? And does the public have the appetite for change? **Michael Thorogood** of Dods Political Intelligence reports

**F**ood production accounts for around a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions, but the role of government in nudging public eating habits to achieve its climate goals is contentious. Although scientists have long singled out methane produced by cattle as a significant contributor, it remains to be seen if ministers will propose new ways to tackle this in a government Food Strategy white paper due this month.

"The government has a responsibility to address global warming. But should it tell us what to eat? No!" Tom Martin, a sixth-generation farmer from Cambridgeshire, tells *The House*.

"Livestock are a cornerstone of regenerative agriculture. For the government to discourage this would be a short-sighted own goal."

Some green groups, however, believe official guidance on meat consumption is a missing piece of the UK's net-zero jigsaw. The government's 368-page Net Zero Strategy, published in October, does not mention "meat" once and references "beef" only in relation to plans for environmental permitting set out in the 2019 Clean Air Strategy.

"We cannot cut emissions while ignoring meat and dairy," says Clare Oxborrow, an analyst at Friends of the Earth, adding that the government should encourage sustainable diets and plant-based alternatives to meat through its food procurement for schools, hospitals and prisons. "Businesses are way ahead," she says. "They see demand for plant-based food as a long-term trend."

The UK public has shown growing support for net-zero policies – but appears less enthusiastic about measures to provoke a change in consumption habits. Of eight net-zero policies surveyed by Ipsos MORI in October, taxes on meat and dairy were the least popular. Yet Britain may have already passed its meat peak. A recent study

in *The Lancet* found meat consumption in the UK had fallen 17 per cent in the last decade.

Some UK farming groups argue provenance is the key to reducing the climate impact of food. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) says UK farming has made progress in reducing its carbon footprint as it aims for net-zero food production by 2040. It says emissions from UK beef production are around half the global average, due to its extensive grass-based system.

"When people buy British meat and dairy, they buy sustainable, local food," Stuart Roberts, deputy president of the NFU, tells *The House*. "The same cannot always be said for plant-based proteins. You can play your part simply by considering where your food is from."

The government promised to respond to the independent National Food Strategy, published in July 2021, with a white paper within six months.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says the government has no plans to introduce a meat tax, but is considering measures to encourage sustainable diets and change public sector procurement of food.

While farmers wait to see whether the government will move to persuade or compel people to eat less meat – or avoid the issue altogether – some, such as Coombe Farm Organic, which produces organic pork, beef and lamb in Somerset, believe consumers can do their bit by supporting more environmentally friendly producers.

"Buying less meat means you can choose to spend a little more on better quality meat that has been sustainably sourced," Jemima Marks, a manager at Coombe Farm, tells *The House*. "Buying local, grass-fed meat that has been reared at the speed nature intended can reduce food miles and help sequester carbon." 🌱



# Meating the net-zero challenge?





**Lord Bruce of Bennachie**

Liberal Democrat Lords spokesperson for Scotland

## Scotch on the rocks: our distilleries need government support to mitigate the damage caused by tariffs and Covid

**W**ho hasn't been seduced by the romance of Scotch whisky, the industry which captures the essence of Scotland in a bottle? The ingredients are simple: barley, water and yeast. Ninety per cent of malting barley comes from Scottish farms which compete to secure the premium it commands.

The water sourced from hill and mountain springs is crucial for Scotch's clarity and purity, which is why most single malt distilleries are located in relatively remote rural locations.

Unlike gin, Scotch whisky requires by law a minimum of three years' maturation, and most single malts are not bottled for market before they are at least 10-years-old. There are serious costs tied up in whisky stored in warehouses while the alchemy of its maturation in sherry or American oak casks in the moist environment of rural Scotland works its magic.

So although gin is a competitor to Scotch, most distillers can produce both, with gin generating cash flow while the whisky matures.

For as long as I can remember, Scotch whisky has been close to the top of the UK's export list. In the 1970s, working in economic development, I engaged with the industry across Speyside. As an MP in north-east Scotland, I had as many as 12 distilleries in my constituency. Over the decades, I have seen the industry face ups and downs, with distilleries closed or mothballed. I have seen the emergence of single malts as a significant market, and the opening of new distilleries to meet the demand.

What is clear to me is that Scotch would not have retained its position without consistent innovation, marketing and positive response to challenges – and the last few years have brought a few.

The European Union accounts for a third of our whisky exports. J&B and Coke is the staple drink in almost any Spanish bar. The Italians anoint their ice-cream with single malt. The French too, notwithstanding their domestic wine and brandy, appreciate a good Scotch. So Brexit

has presented challenges, creating more bureaucracy and friction in sourcing supplies of, for example, glass and packaging materials. The post-pandemic supply chain constraints and global inflation

have presented other cost challenges in a competitive market.

Over time, it may be that new trade agreements will open up new markets. The five-year suspension of extra tariffs by the United States has helped, as well as the ending of the five per cent tariff for Australia. The real

prize will be a reduction or elimination of tariffs for the potentially huge Indian market.

A few years ago, I had the honour to be sworn in as a Keeper of the Quaich at an almost Freemason-like event at the industry's biannual banquet at Blair Castle in Perthshire. The accolade is given to friends of the industry who have contributed to its reputation and success, and features keepers from all over the world. Apart from the reverent event, the banquet is an indulgence of all things Scottish – tartan, kilts, bagpipes, music and singing – all in celebration of the elixir that is Scotch.

The industry has demonstrated resilience in the face of manifold challenges. Nothing can be taken for granted. That is why we need good relations with the EU, new beneficial trade agreements, and action to keep costs down.

Rishi Sunak's alcohol tax review has not been welcomed by the industry. I do not understand why we tax our world-class spirits industry more than the mostly imported wine sector. Past experience shows that hiking excise duties on whisky reduces revenues by depressing demand, and it undermines trade negotiations. The industry through its own flair will thrive. Government should help by not adding obstacles, but striving to remove them. 🍷



**“Rishi Sunak's alcohol tax review has not been welcomed by the industry”**



**Luke Pollard**

Labour MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport

## Growing more food in Britain is good for jobs, nature, carbon and national security

**B**ritain needs to grow, rear and catch more of its own food. In an era of globalisation, this can seem like rose-tinted, “Dig for Victory nostalgia”. But in reality, this is a question of hard-nosed national security. Britain has become too reliant on other countries for our food supply. Thirty-five years ago, Britain produced almost 80 per cent of the food it consumed, but today that figure has slumped to just over 60 per cent. If we want to maintain our national security and stay strong in the 21st century, this trend must be reversed.

Covid-19 and Brexit have posed huge challenges to the movement of food and drink between countries. New logistical barriers to the transportation of goods have arisen, with shortages of everything from salt to cider.

Polling data suggests that, at the turn of the year, a majority of British people had experienced food shortages recently. Some supermarkets have even taken to camouflaging empty shelves with cardboard cut-outs of food.

Of course, the solution to these shortages extends beyond growing more food in Britain. Food security is also a question of infrastructure and skills. Thousands of pigs were slaughtered wastefully on farms last year because Britain didn’t have the abattoir workforce to process them properly. Countless apples and other fruit rotted in fields because of a shortage of workers to pick them, and a shortage of HGV drivers to transport them. And millions in taxpayers’ money was reportedly spent in an emergency bailout of CF Fertilisers so the UK food industry had enough carbon dioxide reserves to soldier on.

And while tabloid headlines poke fun at shortages of McDonald’s milkshakes, there is a serious point to be made: logistical problems in getting food to shelves have led to price rises, meaning that more families are struggling to afford their weekly shop.

As Richard Walker, CEO of supermarket chain Iceland, warned last month, there are

people in this country “facing a choice between heating and eating” as a result of price rises. We now live in a country where there are more foodbanks than branches of Sainsbury’s (or Aldi, or Lidl, for that matter).

The climate emergency is another very serious security threat. When resources are scarce, extremism thrives – making supply lines uncertain. Experts have pointed to climate crisis-induced drought for the rise of terrorist organisations including Isis and Boko Haram. By growing more food in Britain, we can slash food miles and harness our climate to grow food more efficiently than they can in Australia or Brazil – cutting carbon in the process – and maintaining our high food production standards.

This government is taking the opposite approach. It is undercutting our farmers with cheap imports from abroad, grown and reared to lower standards, and is cutting the farm payments scheme to shove hard-working farmers out of business. Cheap food from abroad is locking us into a less secure future.

The 1945 Labour government put food policy as an arm of national security. We are not in the same position, but it would do us no harm to re-examine our comfort with ever-extending supply chains and carbon-intensive

production abroad. To cut carbon, we need to grow more in Britain. To safeguard rural jobs, we need to grow more in Britain. To

**“Cheap food from abroad is locking us into a less secure future”**

become more secure at a time of global uncertainty, we need to grow more in Britain.

The government’s betrayal of our farmers in the Australian trade deal means we not only need to demand better, we need to look afresh at food security as a nation. That has to start with making sure every British citizen has enough food to eat, and that the supply of food is assured. There’s work to do. 🌱







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# books & culture

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## Belfast

Kenneth Branagh's moving and important film features marvellous cinematography, compassionate scripting, and sympathetic acting, writes Lord Alderdice



**Inspired casting produces some star performances**  
Buddy and his father, played by Jude Hill and Jamie Dornan

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*The Real Charlie Chaplin*: Neil Coyle is gripped by the shocking life story of a former Kennington boy

PAGE **50**

'An eye for the telling detail': Lord Tugendhat reviews Angus Robertson's *Vienna: The International Capital*



**Lord Alderdice**  
Liberal Democrat peer

**Exploring the pain of the Irish émigré from a perspective that is neither traditional Irish nationalist nor Ulster unionist, Kenneth Branagh's semi-autobiographical movie is authentic, moving and inspired**

## Belfast

Directed by **Sir Kenneth Branagh**  
Broadcaster **General cinema release**

**T**his is a moving and important film which Sir Kenneth Branagh, who wrote and directed it, called "semi-autobiographical". It is

lives and communities for a generation. It impacted heavily on Branagh as a little boy growing up in working-class north Belfast.

His story is told through the

more than 50 years since the return of the sectarian violence that was to wreck



eyes of nine-year old Buddy, brilliantly portrayed by Jude Hill, who may have a future as remarkable as Branagh's own. In star performances, Jamie Dornan and Caitriona Balfe, are his Protestant parents, living out the emotional tensions of 1960s poverty, hugely exacerbated by the outbreak of sectarian violence. These socio-political pressures made protecting family life a daily challenge.

The decisions to use black and white film and contemporaneous newsreel were just some of the touches that gave authenticity and drew me back to that time. Ciarán Hinds was the perfect choice of grandfather, drawing on his own experience of growing up in north Belfast near the Branagh family home. Since his father was a GP serving both sides of the community, Hinds knew the deep divisions well. Jamie Dornan also grew up as the son of a Belfast doctor

and brought this experience to his brilliant portrayal of the father.

Caitríona Balfe is an inspired choice of mother. You could not help feeling for this captivating young woman desperately trying to hold family life together in their “two-up two-down,” with money troubles and her husband working in England, yet still trying to bring a little fun into their lives. The matriarchal structure, the working-class Protestant religiosity, and the sadness of being left behind by old age and emigration were movingly conveyed by Dame Judi Dench, and if she did not quite get a consistent Northern Ireland accent, I suspect only



the locals will really notice.

The moody soundtrack was definitively local. East Belfast man, Van Morrison, contributed nine songs, including one written specially for the film, and even Ruby Murray, the Belfast-born singing sensation of the 1950s gets a spot.

There is plenty of dark Belfast humour and a degree of literary sophistication that may surprise the outsider. Belfast is a deeply divided city,

and the outsider in this film can come from inside the city boundary. A Catholic from west Belfast or a middle-class citizen of south Belfast may remember it all differently. Branagh is exploring the pain of the Irish émigré from a perspective that

is neither traditional Irish nationalist nor Ulster unionist.

Those who were not partisan for either communal identity could find themselves outsiders in a violent conflict and, as in this case, be forced to leave and become outsiders elsewhere. That has been a largely untold Troubles story and the importance of this film is that it brings it alive for insiders and outsiders, and for other conflicts too.



With marvellous cinematography, compassionate scripting, and sympathetic acting this is Northern Irish people and their friends conveying a bleak time with some positivity. Make sure you get to see it. 📺



**“There is plenty of dark Belfast humour”**



**Neil Coyle**

Labour MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark



**The original 'rags to riches' story of a boy from the Kennington slums who became the first global superstar, Peter Middleton and James Spinney's gripping study of Charlie Chaplin's life is both shocking and sensitively handled**

## The Real Charlie Chaplin

Directed by **Peter Middleton & James Spinney**  
 Broadcaster **In selected cinemas from Friday 18 February**

**A**s the MP representing the area where he grew up, it was a privilege to see *The Real Charlie Chaplin*, which I found gripping. Anyone interested in

film history will appreciate the battle, as "talking pictures" trigger the demise of silent movies. Many will love the original "rags to riches" story of a boy from the Kennington slums who became the first

global superstar – a man instantly recognisable in his iconic outfit. The highest paid actor in the world who experienced the workhouse as a child; a workhouse that is now the Cinema Museum.

Some may be intrigued at the story of how Chaplin ended up effectively exiled from the States by a Hoover-led FBI vendetta, branded

a Communist sympathiser by the US government's McCarthyism, and labelled a "Jew" to boot – just as he was by the Nazis who banned his movies from Germany. He was neither a Jew nor a Communist, admitting in the movie to never having voted in his life, despite coming from a part of London steeped in political radicalism. He grew up next to Kennington Park:



the scene of Chartist gatherings of thousands of people.

Much of what he knew growing up is depicted in his work and demonstrated in the film: the rampant poverty, the want, the children struggling and ill-treated. Effie Wisdom, who knew him, is interviewed and describes Chaplin as “always hungry”. Much of the area has changed – slum clearances and the Luftwaffe contributing heavily – with the industrial sites around what was the Surrey Canal forming the beautiful Burgess Park, providing green, outdoor space for all those living locally now who, like Chaplin, have no personal outdoor space.

Sadly, the want still exists. More than 5,000 families in Southwark used local food-banks last year, with the community expected to see higher demand following Universal Credit cuts, higher bills, and a new tax. We don’t have workhouses now but instead of alleviating poverty the government is threatening to sanction people unable to find work, as London struggles to rebuild but gets no “levelling up” funds from government.

With social mobility in decline, Chaplin’s story was a nice blast from the past, but exceptional even for his time. His mother’s mental ill health was captured sensitively in the film, as is his determination to help her despite the “blurred realities” she experienced. His upbringing was brutal though, and the film reveals how this affected him throughout his life, causing him to damage others.

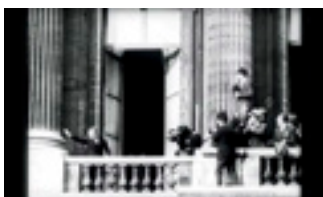
The film shocks in its revelations about his personal life. The appalling treatment of his four wives and 11 children is unforgivable. One wife

divorced him for his “mental cruelty,” and the film describes how he tried to get another to kill herself. She was only a child when they met and he married her as soon as she turned 16. Her autobiography is one of the earliest media scandals and the film tells how their divorce was the most expensive ever, with copies going on sale due to people’s interest in this early celebrity.



In his 80s Charlie Chaplin visited the pub named in his honour at the Elephant and Castle; it was demolished a few years ago to make way for the new University of the Arts London campus. While his scandalous treatment of his family deserves condemnation, his contribution to film-making will continue to be studied in the area he grew up. 🏠

**“The film shocks in its revelations about his personal life”**





**Lord Tugendhat**  
Conservative peer

**Though at times becoming bogged down with too many facts, some well-chosen vignettes and his eye for telling detail prevent Angus Robertson's biography of one of the world's great cites from getting too heavy**

## Vienna

### The International Capital

By **Angus Robertson**  
Publisher **Birlinn**

**W**hen a person has an exciting time in a foreign city in their 20s, it often leads to a lifetime's attachment. They become expert on aspects of its history, culture and architecture and want to share their enthusiasm with others. That is the case with Angus Robertson and *Vienna*. He sees it as no ordinary national capital, let alone the capital of a small central European republic, but as an international capital. When he could not find a book in either English or German dedicated to that theme, he decided "to write it myself".

As the capital for several hundred years, under the Habsburg dynasty, of the Holy Roman Empire followed by the Austrian Empire and finally the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vienna certainly had a long history as one of the great European capitals. That came to an end with defeat in the First World War, the collapse of the

empire and the expulsion of the Habsburgs. After a dismal period in the 1920s and 30s, and its enthusiastic welcome of Hitler when he took over Austria in 1938, it seemed likely, in 1945, that Vienna would sink into obscurity. But beginning with Austria's recovery of its independence in 1955 the city has enjoyed a renaissance. The Austrian government has carved out a niche for itself as a sort of stand by facilitator of solutions to international problems and turned Vienna into the headquarters city of more multi-lateral organisations than any other city in the world. So the city combines a fascinating history, and the magnificent monuments and buildings that derive from that, with a



useful role in today's world.

Those who are posted to the international organisations would do well to read this book. It is a sort of biography of the city focused on the political and cultural history that unfolded there, including

music and ideas. Social history in terms of how the mass of the people lived and what they thought does not feature very much. At times the author gets bogged down by too many names and too many facts so that it becomes difficult to discern the underlying trends and when they change course. However, well-chosen vignettes by contemporary observers through the ages prevent the text from becoming too heavy. He also has an eye for the telling detail and illustrative anecdote.

Because Vienna was the capital of a great multi-ethnic empire, the way Robertson tells his story means that the reader sees the peoples of that empire through the prism of their capital city. They form,

as it were, the supporting cast against the backdrop of which for many centuries, and for most of this book, the Viennese life Robertson describes was played out. This in no way invalidates his narrative. It did though lead me to wonder what, as an SNP member of the Scottish government, he would make of a history of London that dealt in the same way with the rest of the UK, or indeed the British Empire. 🏰



**"Those who are posted to Vienna would do well to read this book"**

Schönbrunn Palace Vienna, Austria

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### *Keynote speaker confirmed:*



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