Second COVID-19 vaccine authorised by medicines regulator

- Vaccine to be made available across the UK to priority groups from Monday
- The UK has pre-ordered 100 million doses of the vaccine
- The NHS will prioritise giving the first dose of the vaccine to those most in need following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the UK's Chief Medical Officers

The second COVID-19 vaccine has been authorised for use in the UK, allowing a significant expansion of the immunisation programme with hundreds more vaccination sites opening in the coming weeks and months to protect those most at risk from the virus.

The UK regulator has accepted the recommendation of the Commission on Human Medicines and authorised the Oxford University/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. This follows months of rigorous clinical trials involving tens of thousands of people and an extensive analysis of the vaccine's safety, quality and effectiveness by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

The vaccine is highly effective in preventing disease, including in the elderly, and vaccinations will begin from next week.

The UK was the first in the world to sign an agreement with Oxford University/AstraZeneca, securing access to 100 million doses of the vaccine on behalf of the whole of the UK, crown dependencies and overseas territories. Hundreds of thousands of doses are available from Monday 4 January with more to be delivered over the coming weeks and months so that, alongside the existing Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, the UK's vaccination programme can continue its steady expansion over the first part of next year.

The vaccine, which was backed by significant government funding, will be available for free across the UK and the government is working with the devolved administrations to ensure it is deployed fairly across the UK.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

> The approval of the Oxford vaccine is a massive step forward in our fight against coronavirus. It is a tribute to the incredible UK scientists at Oxford University and AstraZeneca, whose breakthrough will help to save lives around the world. The light at the end of the tunnel just got brighter.
>
> Vaccines are the exit route from the pandemic. We have already vaccinated hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people and the new Oxford jab will allow us to accelerate our vaccination plan, allowing us to return to normality in the future.

> This is a moment to celebrate British innovation – not only are we responsible for discovering the first treatment to reduce mortality for COVID-19, this vaccine will be made available to some of the poorest regions of the world at a low cost, helping protect countless people from this awful disease.
>
> I want to thank every single person who has been part of this British success story. While it is a time to be hopeful, it is so vital everyone continues to play their part to drive down infections.

In line with the recommendations of the JCVI, the vaccine will be rolled out to the priority groups including care home residents and staff, people over 80 and health and care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and risk, including those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

The vaccine can be stored at fridge temperatures, between 2 and 8 degrees, making it easier to distribute to care homes and other locations across the UK.

The NHS has decades of experience in rolling out successful widespread vaccination programmes and will now begin to implement extensive preparations for the roll-out of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

> The Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine is a great British success story, involving our very best minds at every stage across every part of the UK. As a result of significant government investment, not only has the vaccine been developed on home turf, but we have built a robust supply chain across the country to ensure the UK will be the first in the world to receive this vaccine.
>
> Thanks to the determination and sheer ingenuity of our incredible scientists, this vaccine will save very many lives at home and protect those in some of the world's poorest nations, helping to bring this global pandemic to an end.
>
> From our researchers and manufacturers, to the thousands of trial volunteers and NHS staff who'll administer this life-saving vaccine to those most in need, your country owes you an enormous debt of gratitude. Your unwavering spirit will go down in history.

The MHRA started the rolling review of Oxford/AstraZeneca's data in September and the government asked the regulator to assess the vaccine for its suitability for authorisation under Regulation 174 of the Human Medicines Regulations, enabling the temporary supply of medicines to be authorised in response to a public health need, which the regulator has recommended.

The vaccine will be deployed through similar methods as the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, including:

- hospital hubs for NHS and care staff and older patients to get vaccinated
- local community services with local teams and GPs already signing up to take part in the programme
- vaccination centres across the country, ensuring people can access a vaccine regardless of where they live

In 2016, the UK Vaccine Network provided funding to support Oxford University to develop a vaccine for MERS. This vaccine technology was rapidly repurposed to develop a COVID-19 vaccine using initial funding from a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) research call launched in February.

In April the government announced £20 million of further funding so that the Oxford clinical trials could commence immediately. Since then the government has bought 100 million doses of the final vaccine product via further investment.

The UK government is making every effort to increase the UK's vaccine manufacturing capability to ensure vaccines are widely available to the public. As a result, the vaccine is being made in Oxfordshire and Staffordshire, with filling into vials at sites in North Wales. From the end of 2021, the UK will have 2 new permanent manufacturing sites each with the capability to manufacture tens of millions of doses within 6 months.

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England and co-lead of the National Institute for Health Research, said:

> It is very good news that the independent regulator has now authorised for use the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
>
> There has been a considerable collective effort that has brought us to this point. The dedication and hard work of scientists, regulators and those who funded the research, such as the NIHR, UKRI and United Kingdom Vaccine Network (UKVN), and the willingness and selflessness of so many volunteers who took part in the vaccine trials were essential in delivering this safe and effective vaccine. They deserve our recognition and thanks.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

> This is another remarkable achievement for science in the global effort to tackle COVID-19. The hard work of the researchers and scientists and the selflessness of clinical trial volunteers will soon begin to save lives.
>
> This vaccine is easier to transport and deploy, and will benefit UK

> citizens as well as many vulnerable people around the world.
>
> The UK has secured phased access to very large amounts and so this is fantastic news for NHS vaccine roll-out. The vaccine will protect those who have it, but as we roll this out over the next few months it's crucial we continue to follow the rules to protect each other until enough people have received it.

Through the Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 357 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccines so far. To date, the government has invested over £230 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine. In the Chancellor's Spending Review, published on 25 November, it was announced that the government has made more than £6 billion available to develop and procure successful vaccines.

Vaccine Deployment Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

> Our brilliant NHS teams across the UK have been working tirelessly to vaccinate hundreds of thousands of people with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, despite the significant logistical hurdles.
>
> The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine will significantly boost our efforts to protect those most at risk from COVID-19 as it can be transported easier and, once extensive quality checks have taken place, the vaccine will be sent to vaccination sites across the UK and carefully unpacked ready for vaccinations to begin next week.

The UK's 4 Chief Medical Officers agree with the JCVI advice that at this stage of the pandemic the priority should be to deliver first vaccine doses to as many people on the JCVI phase 1 priority list in the shortest possible timeframe. This will allow the administration of second doses to be completed over the longer timeframes in line with conditions set out by the independent regulator, the MHRA, and advice from the JCVI. The evidence shows one dose of either vaccine provides a high level of protection from COVID-19.

From today the NHS across the UK will prioritise giving the first dose of the vaccine to those in the most high-risk groups, with the second dose due to be administered within 12 weeks after the first. The second dose completes the course and is important for longer-term protection.

The JCVI's independent advice is that this approach will maximise the benefits of both vaccines allowing the NHS to help the greatest number of people in the shortest possible time. It will ensure that more at-risk people are able to get meaningful protection from a vaccine in the coming weeks and months, reducing deaths and starting to ease pressure on our NHS.

With the exception of those who have appointments for their second dose booked this week (week commencing 28 December), the NHS will contact those who have already received their first dose to reschedule their appointment in

line with this new advice.

Interim Chair of the government's Vaccines Taskforce Clive Dix said

> Today is a huge moment for the scientists and researchers involved in this vaccine and is a result of many years of hard work and late nights – I thank them all for their grit and determination.
>
> We recognised the significance of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine right from the start, which is why it was the first vaccine in our diverse portfolio, with the UK being the first country to sign an agreement for 100 million doses and why we fully backed their clinical trials.
>
> The Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine stands out on the global stage because it is being made on a not-for-profit basis and will be available to some of the world's most vulnerable populations. This is an ethos the Vaccines Taskforce shares and we are determined to ensure the fair and equitable access to vaccines across the globe regardless of status and influence.

The JCVI has also amended its previous highly precautionary advice on COVID-19 vaccines for pregnancy or breastfeeding. Vaccination with either vaccine in pregnancy should be considered where the risk of infection is high and cannot be avoided, or where the woman has underlying conditions that place her at very high risk of serious complications of COVID-19, and the risks and benefits of vaccination should be discussed.

Those who are trying to become pregnant do not need to avoid pregnancy after vaccination, and breastfeeding women may be offered vaccination with either vaccine following consideration of the woman's clinical need for immunisation against COVID-19. The UK Chief Medical Officers agree with this advice.

The MHRA has also updated its advice on administering the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to people with allergies, recommending that anyone with a previous history of allergic reactions to the ingredients of the vaccine should not receive it, but those with any other allergies such as a food allergy can now have the vaccine.

The full prioritisation list is (in order of priority):

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over.
6. All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality

7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

Vaccination will be managed by the health services in each nation:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement
- NHS Wales
- NHS Scotland
- Health and Social Care Northern Ireland

Until the end of December, and as part of the transition period, vaccines must be authorised via the European Medicines Agency and that authorisation will automatically be valid in the UK.

However, if a suitable COVID-19 vaccine candidate, with strong supporting evidence of safety, quality and effectiveness from clinical trials becomes available before the end of the transition period, EU legislation which we have implemented – Regulation 174 – allows the MHRA to temporarily authorise the supply of a medicine or vaccine, based on public health need.

Through the government's Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 357 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates, including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer for 40 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses
- Moderna for 7 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses
- Valneva for 60 million doses

UK vaccine manufacturing

The UK government invested £100 million to fund a state-of-the-art manufacturing innovation centre in Braintree, Essex, in collaboration with the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, to accelerate the mass production of a successful COVID-19 vaccine in the UK. Due to open in December 2021, the Centre will have the capacity to produce millions of doses of vaccines each month, ensuring the UK has the capabilities to manufacture both vaccines and advanced medicines, including for emerging diseases, far into the future.

The government has also provided £4.7 million funding to the Catapult to ensure that the UK has the best skills and expertise in vaccine manufacturing and advanced therapies

The government has created the UK's first dedicated Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (VMIC) and accelerated its development with £93 million of investment. This investment will rapidly accelerate the construction of the facility, enabling us to bring it online sooner. It will also have expanded capability for advanced vaccine process development, fill and finish and bulk

manufacture. In addition, the facility's capacity will be significantly increased to be able to respond to this pandemic. Once open, it will be able to manufacture 70 million vaccines doses in just 6 months – enough for the UK population. Located in Oxfordshire the centre will be the UK's first not-for-profit organisation established to develop and advance the mass production of vaccines. This will boost the UK's long-term capacity against future viruses.

While VMIC is being built, the government established a Rapid Deployment Facility with £8.75 million investment to manufacture at scale

The government has made a multi-million-pound investment in a manufacturing facility in Scotland, creating a major UK vaccine facility and to support rapid scale-up if its candidate is successful. This unique facility will establish a permanent UK capability to manufacture inactivated viral vaccines – one of the most proven, widely used vaccine formats. It is one of few Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) containment facilities in Europe and has the capacity to produce up to 200 million doses annually of COVID-19 viral vaccines in 2021.

JCVI issues advice on the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommends that both the AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are safe and provide high-levels of protection against coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, including severe disease.

As protection is obtained around 2 weeks after the first vaccine dose, the committee recommends that vaccinating more people with the first dose is prioritised above offering others their second dose. This will provide the greatest public health benefits in the short term and save more lives.

The committee has reviewed the safety and efficacy data for the vaccine and advises that for those most at risk of death and serious illness from COVID-19, both the AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are acceptably safe and effective. High levels of protection are obtained after the first dose of vaccine.

The current evidence remains that increasing age is the single greatest risk factor. Therefore, the current recommendation is that groups continue to be vaccinated in the following order:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over, and health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over, and individuals deemed clinically

extremely vulnerable
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. Adults aged 18 to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

This initial phase of the vaccine programme is estimated to cover around 99% of preventable COVID-19 deaths.

The JCVI advises that vaccinating more people with the first dose is prioritised above offering others their second dose, to maximise benefits from the vaccination programme in the short term.

For the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the second vaccine dose can be offered between 3 to 12 weeks after the first dose. For the AstraZeneca vaccine, the second dose can be offered 4 to 12 weeks after the first dose.

There are some data from the AstraZeneca vaccine trials suggesting that extending the time to the second dose may be better than having the second dose earlier.

Skipping the second dose is not advised, as the second dose may be important for longer lasting protection, however exact durations of protection are currently unknown.

Evidence from Phase 3 trials indicate high levels of protection against serious disease and death from around 2 weeks after the first dose.

Professor Wei Shen Lim, COVID-19 Chair for JCVI, said:

> The JCVI has considered the safety and efficacy data on the AstraZeneca vaccine and we are pleased to say that it is acceptably safe and effective – as with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.
>
> For both vaccines, high-levels of protection are evident after the first dose of vaccine. JCVI advises priority should be given to the first dose, to maximise the public health benefits in the current situation and save more lives.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisations at Public Health England (PHE), said:

> The recommendations from the JCVI and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) provide confidence that the AstraZeneca vaccine has met the very high standards needed to roll out the vaccine. This, alongside the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, is yet another big step forward in tackling the virus.
>
> Prioritising the first dose will also help prevent as many deaths

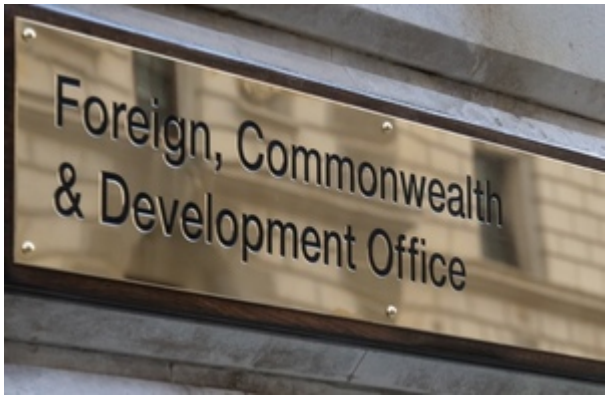
from COVID-19 as possible. Once deployed, PHE will continue working alongside the MHRA to keep the safety and efficacy of the vaccine under constant review.

The committee will publish updated advice following full consideration of Phase 3 safety and efficacy data on COVID-19 vaccines.

Statement on the approval of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine for use in the UK

News story

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has made the following statement on the approval of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

“A global pandemic requires global solutions. The UK and its scientific expertise is a key part of the international fight against coronavirus and thanks to hard work at Oxford University and AstraZeneca, the world is one step closer to defeating it. This month I visited a health clinic in India where this vaccine will be administered.

“As the biggest country donor this year to both CEPI and to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, we are also leading the way in making sure vaccines will be accessible to developing countries.”

Background:

- At the UK hosted Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020, AstraZeneca committed that 300 million doses of the Oxford University vaccine candidate would be made available to the COVAX facility. The UK has

committed up to £548 million to the AMC which will go towards helping developing countries access vaccines, including the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
- AstraZeneca has also announced a licencing agreement for the Serum Institute India (SII) to produce 1 billion doses of the vaccine candidate for low- and middle-income countries.
- AstraZeneca is working with governments, multilateral organisations and collaborators around the world to ensure broad and equitable access to the vaccine at no profit for the duration of the pandemic.

Published 30 December 2020

Prime Minister's opening statement to the House of Commons on the UK-EU deal: 30 December 2020

Thank you Mr Speaker, can I begin by thanking you and the House authorities and all your staff and their hard work in allowing us to meet today, and can I also welcome the outstanding news that AstraZeneca is now rolling out a new UK made vaccine approved by the MHRA that offers the hope to millions in this country and around the world, Mr Speaker I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time,

and having taken back control of our money, our borders, our laws and our waters by leaving the European Union on Jan 31st, we now seize the moment

to forge a fantastic new relationship with our European neighbours, based on free trade and friendly co-operation.

And at the heart of this Bill is one of the biggest free trade agreements in the world, a comprehensive Canada-style deal, worth over £660 billion,

which, if anything, should allow our companies to do even more business with our European friends,

safeguarding millions of jobs and livelihoods in our UK and across the continent.

In less than 48 hours, we will leave the EU single market and the customs union, as we promised

and yet British exporters will not face a sudden thicket of trade barriers,

but rather, for the first time in the history of EU agreements, zero tariffs and zero quotas.

And just as we have avoided trade barriers, so we have also ensured the UK's full control of our laws and our regulations

and there is a vital symmetry between those two achievements,

because the central purpose of this Bill is to accomplish something that the British people always knew in their hearts could be done,

but which we were continually told was impossible, we were told we could not have our cake and eat it, do you remember how often we were told that Mr Speaker,

namely that we could trade and cooperate with our European neighbours on the closest terms of friendship and goodwill,

whilst retaining sovereign control of our laws and our national destiny.

And that unifying thread runs through every clause of

this Bill, it embodies our vision – shared with our European neighbours –

of a new relationship between Britain and the EU as sovereign equals,

joined by friendship, commerce, history, interests and values, while respecting one another's freedom of action and recognising that we have nothing to fear if we sometimes choose to do things differently

and we have much to gain from the healthy stimulus of competition. And this Bill demonstrates therefore how Britain can be at once European and sovereign.

And I think you'll agree Mr Speaker our negotiators accomplished their feat with astonishing speed.

It took nearly 8 years for the Uruguay Round of world trade talks to produce a deal,

and five years for the EU to reach a trade agreement with Canada, six for Japan.

We have done this in less than a year, in the teeth of a pandemic,

and we have pressed ahead with this task, resisting all the calls for delay, Mr Speaker

precisely because creating certainty about our future

provides the best chance of beating Covid and bouncing back even more strongly next year. And that was our objective.

So I hope the House will join me in commending my Noble Friend Lord Frost and every member of his team for their skill, their mastery and their perseverance in translating our vision into a practical agreement.

And let me also pay tribute to President Ursula von der Leyen, Michel Barnier and all our European friends for their pragmatism and foresight

and for their understanding that it is profoundly in the interests of the EU to live alongside a prosperous, contented and sovereign United Kingdom.

The House understands the significance of the fact that the basis of this agreement is not EU law but international law,

so there is no direct effect,

the EU law will no longer have any special status in the UK

and there is no jurisdiction for the European Court of Justice.

We will be able to design our own standards and regulations,

And Mr Speaker the laws that this House of Commons passes will be interpreted – and I know this is of keen interest to honourable and right honourable members – solely by British judges sitting in British courts.

We will have opportunity to devise new ways to spur and encourage the flourishing sectors in which this country leads the world,

from green energy and life sciences to synthetic biology.

We will be free Mr Speaker of EU state aid rules,

We'll be able to decide where and how we level up across our country with new jobs and new hope,

including with freeports and new green industrial zones of a kind I'm sure he'd approve of.

And if, in using our new freedoms, either Britain or the EU believes it is somehow being unfairly undercut,

then subject to independent third party arbitration – and provided the measures are proportionate –

either of us can decide, as sovereign equals, to protect our consumers.

But this treaty explicitly envisages that any such action should be infrequent

and it banishes the old concepts of uniformity and harmonisation in favour of the right to make our own regulatory choices and deal with the consequences.

And Mr Speaker, every modern free trade agreement includes reciprocal commitments designed to prevent distortions of trade

and the true significance of the agreement embodied in this Bill

is that there is no role for the European Court of Justice,

no ratchet clause on labour or environmental standards

and no dynamic alignment with the EU State Aid regime – or indeed any other aspect of EU law.

In every respect, we have recovered our freedom of action.

We will be free of the strictures of the Common Agricultural Policy,

We'll be able to conserve our landscapes and support our farmers exactly as we choose.

And on Friday – for the first time 50 years – on Friday

the UK will once again be recognised as an independent coastal state, regaining control of our waters,

righting the wrong that was done by the Common Fisheries Policy throughout our EU Membership.

And of course, I've always recognised Mr Speaker that this was going to be a difficult period for our European friends and partners, because they've been fishing in these waters for decades if not centuries and at first – as the House will know – they sought an adjustment period of 14 years,

but our negotiators whittled that down to five and a half years,

during which the UK's share – in that five and a half years – the UK's share of our fish in our waters will rise from over half today to around two thirds.

And of course we would like to have done this more quickly,

but it's also true that once the adjustment period comes to an end, there will be no limit Mr speaker – other than the limits placed by the needs of science and conservation – on our ability to make use of our marine wealth,

and 15 per cent of the EU's historic catch from our waters will be returned to this country next year alone.

And as I say to prepare our fishing communities for that moment, we will invest £100 million in a programme to modernise their fleets and the fish processing industry,

Restoring Mr Speaker a great British industry to the eminence that it deserves, levelling up communities across the UK – particularly and including in Scotland

Where their interests in my view have been neglected for too long.

So I do find it extraordinary that on the eve of this great opportunity the declared position of the Scottish National nationalist Party is to hand control – with a small n – is to hand control of the very waters we have just reclaimed straight back to the EU. That is their policy Mr Speaker.

And they plan to ensnare Scotland's fishing fleet in the dragnets of the Common Fisheries Policy all over again.

And, in the meantime, Mr Speaker – guess what they are going to do today – they are going to vote today for a "No Deal Brexit",

proving once and for all,

that the interests of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland

are best served by a One Nation party serving One United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker, this deal was negotiated by a big team, and he should know this, from every part of our United Kingdom,

and it serves the whole of the UK,

not least by protecting the integrity of the United Kingdom single internal market and Northern Ireland's place within it.

Our points-based immigration system will end free movement and give us full control over who enters our country and by the way on that point I want to thank very much my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for all he did to protect the interest of Northern Ireland.

And at the same time the deal provides certainty for airlines and hauliers – who have suffered grievously during this pandemic –

It guarantees the freedom of British citizens to travel to and from the EU, and retain access to healthcare.

It provides certainty for our police, for our border forces, for our security agencies, who work alongside our European friends to keep our people safe. They are going to vote against this Mr Speaker.

It provides certainty for our partnerships on scientific research,

because we want our country to be a science superpower, but also a collaborative science superpower.

And it provides certainty for business Mr Speaker.

from financial services to our world leading manufactures, including our car industry,

safeguarding highly skilled jobs and investment across our country.

As for the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, I am delighted that he has found yet another position on Brexit,

and having plunged down every blind alley and exhausted every possible alternative,

he has come to the right conclusion,

namely to vote for this agreement which this Government has secured.

But alas the good news about the Labour party stops there

Because I'm told the Right Honourable Gentleman intends to ask the British people for a mandate to rewrite the deal in 2024. That's what he wants to do.

I think frankly Mr Speaker we got Brexit done, let's keep Brexit done,

and let's keep Brexit done, and let's press ahead with this Government's mission to unite and level up across our whole country

and grasp the opportunities before us.

Because I have always said that Brexit is not an end but a beginning,

and the responsibility now rests with all of us to make the best use of the powers that we have regained,

and the tools that we have taken back into our hands.

And we're going to begin by fulfilling our manifesto promise to maintain the highest standards of labour and environmental regulation,

because no caricature could be more inaccurate

than the idea of some bargain basement, Dickensian Britain,

as if enlightened EU regulation has in the past been our only salvation from Dickensian squalor.

Our national standards have always been among the very best in the world

and this House can be trusted to use its new freedom to keep them that way, without any outside invigilation.

We are going to open Mr Speaker a new chapter in our national story, striking free trade deals around the world, adding to the agreements with 63 countries we have already achieved,

and reasserting Global Britain as a liberal, outward-looking force for good.

Detaching ourselves from the EU is only a prelude to the greater task of establishing our new role,

and this country is contributing more than any other to vaccinate people across the world against Covid

and leading the way in preventing future pandemics and we will continue to campaign for 12 years of quality education for every girl in the world and I thank my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary for what he's doing on that,

and we will continue to lead the drive towards global net zero, as we host

COP26 in Glasgow next year.

And I hope and believe – and I think actually the tone this morning has given me encouragement in this belief Mr Speaker – the mood in the House this morning which seems to me on the whole to be positive. I hope in spite of the as usual, thin, synthetic, confected indignation that we hear from some of the benches opposite – I hope and believe that this agreement will also serve to end some of the rancour and recrimination that we've had in recent years,

allow us to come to together as a country, to leave old arguments, old desiccated super masticated arguments behind, move on and build a new and great future for our country.

Because those of us who campaigned for Britain to leave the EU never sought a rupture with our closest neighbours.

We never wanted to sever ourselves from fellow democracies beneath whose soil lie British war graves in tranquil cemeteries,

often tended by local schoolchildren,

testament to our shared struggle for freedom and everything we cherish in common.

What we wanted was not a rupture but a resolution, a resolution of the old, tired, vexed question of Britain's political relations with Europe, which has bedevilled our post-War history. First, we stood aloof, then we became a half-hearted, sometimes obstructive member of the EU.

Now, with this Bill, we are going to become a friendly neighbour – the best friend and ally the EU could have – working hand-in-glove whenever our values and interests coincide while fulfilling the sovereign wish of the British people to live under their own laws, made by their own elected Parliament.

That is the historic resolution delivered by this Bill and Mr Speaker I commend it to the House.

Significant milestone reached with concrete 'mega pour'

News story

Work on Dounreay's newest radioactive waste store went up a storey last week, with the completion of a 'mega' concrete pour.

The first floor slab in the new radioactive waste store is now complete

The construction project was one of the first to re-start work on 22 June, following the easing of lock down restrictions. The 60-strong team has had to learn COVID-19 compliant ways of working, sometimes in close proximity with each other, to keep themselves and their colleagues safe on site. Since then they have poured 1,500 tonnes of concrete and the building walls have now risen to above the first floor level.

Last week the team embarked on the biggest concrete pour of the project so far, working for 9 hours to lay the floor slab in the crane maintenance bay (CMB) on the first floor of the building, with 27 lorries delivering 425 tonnes of concrete. An overnight shift completed the job in the early hours of the morning.

Dounreay Project Manager Dave Busby said that casting the CMB floor slab was a significant construction milestone as it will allow the team to install the 170 tonne CMB shield door early next year.

He added:

> The team has overcome considerable obstacles this year, being COVID-19 compliant as they continue to work through the pandemic.

Dounreay awarded the contract to construct the new intermediate level waste store to GRAHAM Construction Ltd. Work started in 2018 and is expected to take around 3 years to complete. It will hold drums of waste in safe long term storage in accordance with Scottish Government policy.

Dounreay is Scotland’s largest nuclear decommissioning project and is widely recognised as one of Europe’s most complex nuclear closure programmes. The work is being delivered by DSRL, a company owned by Cavendish Dounreay Partnership, on behalf of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Published 30 December 2020