

The Sylvans

Detailed summary powered by AI

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Motion: climate policy should now focus on adaptation, not mitigation.

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1. Analysis of the outcome

By eight votes to seven, with five abstentions, a motion that led by four at the opening show of hands was defeated. The proposition made the more concrete case and the opposition the more complete one. Over a long floor debate the argument moved from what Britain should build to who is responsible for the problem, and on that ground the proposer's national frame came under steady pressure.

The proposition's case: water, power and proportion

The opening speech was built from the particular. Kent without water, Beckton mothballed, a blackout averted on the night of a World Cup match: each example was local, recent and hard to dispute in the room. It made adaptation sound like ordinary competent government rather than surrender, and that was the speech's main strength.

The second half made a different argument. The refinery example and the 0.74 per cent figure argued less for adaptation than against net zero as currently pursued, and it was this half the floor took up. Several later speakers answered the 1 per cent point directly; nobody engaged with the reservoirs. The case for adaptation was left almost entirely to the proposer, while the case against mitigation drew fire from every side.

The closing held to the national frame and supplied the most quotable line of the evening. 'Life is not fair' was candid and consistent with everything the proposer had said. It arrived, though, after a floor speaker had been made to answer the fairness question aloud and had conceded it. Its rhetorical effect was to give up the moral ground the opposition had been claiming all evening rather than contest it.

The opposition's case: limits, cost and cooperation

The opposer's opening was the most structured speech of the night, with four arguments announced and delivered in order. The patient analogy set the terms early: adaptation as painkillers, mitigation as the cure. By conceding at once that adaptation is necessary, the opposer turned the motion into a question of priority, and made the words 'not mitigation' the part the proposition had to defend.

Its weakness was distance. Wet-bulb temperatures, Himalayan glaciers and global GDP did not meet the proposer's Kent and Beckton on the same ground. The closing corrected that. It answered the energy argument with British prices and British import figures, recast renewables as energy sovereignty, and pointed to policies already under way. The opposition finished on the proposer's home territory, arguing that mitigation was itself a way of protecting Britain.

One part of the opening case took damage from the floor. The Montreal Protocol was offered as proof that countries can act together, and a floor speaker answered that giving up CFCs had cost nobody anything, whereas asking China to give up coal would cost a great deal. The opposer did not return to the point. It left the claim that cooperation is possible resting on the Paris pledges alone, which the proposer's closing attacked through India's and China's coal.

The ebb and flow of the floor in the climate change mitigation debate

Across 13 floor speeches, four battlegrounds emerged.

Britain's 1 per cent. The proposer's figure for Britain's share of emissions was the most contested claim of the evening. Speakers answered it with cumulative emissions, per capita emissions, emissions embedded in imports and Britain's diplomatic weight. Two defended it on its own terms: one as a public good from which Britain would recover a sliver of its spending, another as negligible beside world poverty. By the closing, the proposer was making the point again through India and China rather than through Britain's share.

Natural variation. Two early speakers argued that the climate has always changed and that adapting is all that remains. After the break another speaker disputed the historical claim with temperature figures. Nobody returned to it, so the strongest version of the case that mitigation is pointless was left standing on contested ground.

Who pays. Poorer countries ran through the evening and came to a head in the exchange over whether they should fund their own adaptation. The admission that this was obviously not fair was the one moment where a speaker leaning towards the motion gave ground in public. The proposer's closing answered that fairness does not exist, which held the position without winning the point back.

Both. Several floor speakers said the answer was both. That was in effect the opposer's own position, which granted adaptation a place while denying it priority. A room that kept saying both was, on the motion's own wording, declining to say 'not mitigation'.

The climate change mitigation case built from the floor

The opposition's best argument on cost came from the floor rather than from the opener. Figures for the net cost of net zero set against the cost of inaction answered the question the proposer had posed at the start, and asked a new one: what does adaptation cost? No speaker for the motion offered a number.

The proposition's sharpest floor contribution, mitigation as a public good and adaptation as a private one, was never answered on its own terms. It was overtaken by the exchange on fairness that followed it, and by the time the closings came the room was discussing obligation rather than return on investment.

The proposition's other strong material from the floor pulled in two directions at once. One supporter argued that the climate warms whatever Britain does, which made climate change mitigation pointless. Another argued that Britons should fly less, eat locally and use less AI, which is mitigation by another name. Both spoke for the motion, but the second speech made the opposer's point that the two cannot be separated more vividly than the opposer had.

What the climate change mitigation debate left unexamined

The proposer's practical programme was barely debated. Reservoirs, flood defences, gas storage and grid upgrades were set out in detail at the start, and no speaker on either side argued against any of them. The opposition never claimed Britain should not build reservoirs. A debate about priority might have asked whether money spent on carbon pricing was money not spent on flood walls, and nobody costed that trade.

Nuclear power appeared on both sides, as the proposer's preferred baseline and as part of the opposer's low-carbon mix, and the agreement went unremarked. The motion's word 'now' also went unexamined: whether the balance should shift today, or whether, after a summer of hosepipe bans, it already has.

What drove the result

The room did not divide on whether to adapt. It divided on whether adapting meant giving up on mitigation, and the motion's 'not mitigation' asked it to say yes. Most of the floor said both, and the opposer had made both into the opposition's case within the first minutes.

The shift from nine to five in favour to seven to eight against cannot be read as persuasion, because the room grew between the votes. What can be said is where the argument went. It travelled from Kent to the world's poorest countries, from Britain's share of emissions to Britain's responsibility for them, and the proposer's closing chose to hold the national frame rather than follow. The house accepted that Britain must adapt, and declined to say it should stop trying to reduce the need.

2. Detailed transcript

The climate change mitigation motion, and the opening show of hands

The motion for tonight: climate policy should now focus on adaptation, not mitigation. On this one, people might have a pre-formed view, so let's take a pre-vote. I'll read the motion again. Climate policy should now focus on adaptation, not mitigation. All those currently in favour, please raise your hand. You don't have to vote, but if you're currently in favour of the motion, you can vote. And all those opposed currently? Okay, so we do have a split. We'll look at whether there's any swing at the end of the debate.

The proposition: reservoirs, floods and a near-blackout

Mr Chairman and fellow Sylvans, well, we've had a hot, dry summer. Five heatwaves, a hosepipe ban over most of the country, parts of Kent cut off from water for days at a time, having to wash, cook, clean and flush the toilet with bottled water. Imagine that. This is a country with plentiful rainfall. We need more reservoirs, if only to keep up with population growth. There hasn't been one in the last 30 years. London is short of water. There's been talk of a new reservoir at Abingdon in Oxfordshire for as long as I can remember, but it hasn't happened yet. And London does have a desalination plant at Beckton, which can purify water for up to a million people. But guess what? It's mothballed. It has been since it was built, because it's too expensive to run. It uses electricity. Well, we'll come back to that.

There are also a surprising number of areas prone to flooding: Somerset, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, but also Cumbria, Cornwall, Hull and Great Yarmouth. And flooding is very destructive. We need better flood defences, especially as extra rainfall is predicted for this coming winter. But I don't see it on the government's agenda.

Now, on the 23rd of June last, just before 8pm, when certain of us were settling down to watch the World Cup match against Ghana, a crisis was unfolding at NESO, the National Energy System Operator. The sun had set, so there was very little energy from solar, if any. The wind had dropped, so very little from the wind. Two of the gas-fired power plants were out of commission, and there was not enough energy being generated to meet the demand. So there was a panicked phone call to their counterparts in France: could they please supply us with energy across the interconnector? The French obligingly said yes, and so a blackout was averted at the last minute. Not often we can say the French have come to the rescue, but they did on this occasion. For a price, of course.

Now, wind is intermittent; it blows, and there can be a lull for days. Solar is intermittent; it can be bright or obscured by cloud. There has to be something to provide a baseline to plug the gaps, and that is gas-fired power stations, which provide that function. Ideally it would be nuclear, but we are very far behind with nuclear. The government has only just approved a drawing-board plan for mini nuclear reactors, and Sizewell C is way over budget and well beyond its scheduled time. So we need more gas, not less, to tide us over the next few months and years, and yet the government is reluctant to invest in gas storage and wants to phase out gas entirely. Our European neighbours are stocking up their supplies of gas while we dither, as usual.

Well, where does our gas come from? Mainly from Norway, since the route from Qatar is blocked. Now, Norway exploits its oil and gas fields, including inside the Arctic Circle, and sells it to us, while we refuse to exploit our own oil and gas fields. Although, to be fair, the Jackdaw field may possibly be reopened soon.

But another factor is the transmission network, which we call the National Grid. This was never designed for wind and solar, and it urgently needs upgrading. Well, this is happening; it's ongoing, but it

will take years. And there are times when wind and solar generate so much electricity that the grid cannot handle it, and NESO has to ask the operating companies to switch them off. Now, this costs money. NESO's own figure for the current year for switching off wind power is 3.2 billion pounds. That is to switch off the wind power because the grid cannot handle what is being generated.

NESO has the unenviable task of juggling intermittent generation from wind and solar with intermittent demand, which is a near impossible task, and which is why we need baseline gas and nuclear for backup. So to reiterate: we need more reservoirs, we need more flood defences, we need more nuclear, we need an upgrade to the National Grid, we need more gas storage.

The proposition: net zero, refineries and the 1 per cent

The question is not whether we should act. The question is whether the policies imposed in the name of climate action are effective, affordable and honest. Climate change is a scientific phenomenon. Net zero by 2050 is a political programme. Net zero has become a slogan where Britain needs a plan. Net zero allows politicians to announce a virtuous destination without explaining how we will reach it, what it will cost, who will pay for it, which industries will survive, or whether it will reduce global emissions at all.

Now, what are the UK's global emissions? Less than three quarters of 1 per cent of global carbon emissions: 0.74 per cent, which is less than Vietnam, Australia and South Africa, and on a par with Egypt. Is reducing it further going to affect the climate? Well, of course not. It's too small, too little. In fact, it may cause more harm, and here is why.

I will give you an example. Britain has lost two oil refineries in just over the last year, leaving four operating sites. Liquid fuels still provide 47 per cent of British energy consumption, and we have to import large amounts of diesel and jet fuel. These fuels are essential for road freight, agriculture, construction and aviation. Refineries are covered by the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. This places a financial penalty on emissions of carbon dioxide, creating an incentive to reduce pollution. But there are no more reductions that Britain's refineries can make, which puts them at a disadvantage against countries that do not have carbon pricing regimes. It makes refining in Britain more expensive, and importing fuel from countries which do not impose carbon costs is cheaper.

Closing a British refinery does not make UK demand for diesel or jet fuel disappear. It increases imports. The emissions are not eliminated. They are simply moved elsewhere. Total emissions rise, because somewhere else tends to have higher emissions, and there are further emissions from transporting the products to the UK. Emissions may be reduced in the UK, but global emissions rise. That is not decarbonisation; it's economic vandalism.

In the UK, net zero taxes, subsidies and system costs account for at least 40 per cent of electricity generating costs, about 22 billion pounds every year. The carbon tax alone adds roughly a third to wholesale electricity prices. Energy costs determine whether factories open or close, whether restaurants survive, whether families can afford to heat their homes. If our model creates the highest industrial electricity prices in the world, shuts factories and transfers production to countries burning more coal, nobody will follow us. Instead, other countries will take our jobs and grow their economies.

Meanwhile, in Britain, more and more people are employed to inspect emissions, write climate compliance documents and distribute subsidies, and their salaries are ultimately funded by the workers and businesses being regulated out of existence. We need to stop trying to save the entire planet, and do practical things to help us adjust to climate change now.

The opposition: the patient and the poison

Good evening, everyone. I'm the speaker for the opposition. Imagine a patient diagnosed with a severe, fast-moving illness brought on by a chronic toxic habit. The doctor delivers a stark reality check: if the patient doesn't stop consuming the toxin immediately, their vital organs will fail. In that critical moment, does the patient demand stronger painkillers and a more comfortable hospital bed, or do they immediately cut off the toxin to save their own life? Advocating for adaptation over mitigation is exactly like demanding a higher dose of painkillers while continuing to swallow the poison. It is a fatal distraction.

Tonight, I will argue that climate mitigation, halting emissions at the source, is the only cure. Treating adaptation as an equal strategy is not pragmatism; it is palliative care for a planet we are fully capable of saving.

Let's look at the brutal, unvarnished facts. We are approaching irreversible tipping points. We have already locked in over 1.1 degrees Celsius of warming. Passing 1.5 degrees risks triggering the collapse of polar ice sheets and the Amazon rainforest, systems no amount of engineering can adapt to. The human cost is already catastrophic. Climate change causes over 150,000 deaths annually. If we do not mitigate, extreme heat and agricultural collapse will create over 1.2 billion climate refugees by the mid-century. Adaptation is a financial black hole. Unchecked emissions could cost the global economy 178 trillion US dollars over the next 50 years. No nation can afford to infinitely rebuild infrastructure destroyed by increasingly violent storms.

The proposition will argue that the house is already on fire, and we must learn to live with the heat. They will tell you to build higher sea walls and engineered crops, or even gas storage or more power stations. I will outline four arguments as to why mitigation must be our focus. Firstly, I'll explain that adaptation has hard limits. Secondly, that mitigation is possible. Thirdly, I'll show you how mitigation makes adaptation cheaper and more effective. Finally, I'll outline why mitigation does not require a drop in living standards. I don't, however, argue that adaptation is not necessary. But our focus must remain on mitigation.

The opposition: the hard limits of adaptation

So first, on to adaptation and its hard limits. Climate change is a physical crisis. As global temperatures climb, a dangerous myth has taken hold: the illusion of infinite adaptation, the belief that human ingenuity, building sea walls and air conditioning, can engineer a warming world. But this argument ignores the laws of physics and biology. Whilst adaptation is a necessary tactical survival tool, it has absolute hard physical limits. If we do not use mitigation to halt warming, we will rapidly collide with physical thresholds no amount of money or technology can cross. To understand these hard boundaries, we must look at where adaptation physically breaks down.

First, there are biological limits. Human physiology has an unyielding threshold: the wet-bulb temperature. When humidity and heat rise together past 35 degrees Celsius, the human body can no longer cool itself through sweat. It is a hard law of physics. No amount of adaptation can protect outdoor agricultural workers, or entire populations, when the ambient air itself becomes physically lethal.

Second, there are structural and geological limits. Look at the recent catastrophic glacial collapse along the Nepal-Tibet border. Rising temperatures thawed the underlying permafrost, causing an entire glacier to collapse. It unleashed a 40-mile-an-hour wall of liquid concrete that obliterated downstream valleys. You cannot build a reinforced barrier to stop millions of tons of high-velocity debris.

Third, there are ecological tipping points, which must be avoided to keep the air breathable, the water drinkable and the food systems operational. The UK government's landmark report, Global Biodiversity

Loss, Ecosystem Collapse and National Security, made it clear that ecosystems face hard thresholds. If temperatures force critical biomes like coral reefs or rainforests past their physical tipping points, they collapse immediately. You cannot adapt an agricultural system to grow crops if the fundamental global biosphere that regulates soil, water and pollinators has disintegrated.

So mitigation is not about managing the symptoms; it is about respecting physical boundaries. Unlike adaptation, which tries to survive an increasingly broken planet, mitigation preserves the stable climate system that makes human biology and civilisation possible in the first place.

The opposition: why climate change mitigation is possible, and cheaper

On to argument two: why mitigation is possible. The argument between mitigation and adaptation is often framed as mitigation being impossible, both technologically and due to a lack of international cooperation. I will tackle both of these to demonstrate that mitigation is possible.

Firstly, on science and technology. The adaptation argument can imply that meaningful mitigation is somehow beyond our technological capabilities. It isn't. We know scientifically what needs to happen. Global greenhouse gas emissions need to fall sharply and ultimately reach net zero. We also increasingly have the technologies to do it. We can generate electricity from wind, solar and nuclear. We can electrify transport and heating. And these aren't speculative technologies sitting in a laboratory. They are already being deployed at enormous scale. The challenge is primarily one of speed, investment, infrastructure and policy, not whether the underlying science is possible. There is also a powerful dynamic at work: technologies get better when we deploy them. Solar panels, batteries and electric vehicles have all become dramatically cheaper and more efficient as investment and deployment have scaled.

The second strand focuses on global cooperation, which is required for mitigation to work. The proposition want you to buy into a dangerous myth. They want you to believe that international cooperation to mitigate climate change is an impossible dream. They argue that national self-interest will always block collective action. But this cynical view is flatly contradicted by history. In the 1980s, the Earth's ozone layer was rapidly collapsing. The culprit was CFCs, and what did the world do? In 1987, every single nation on earth signed the Montreal Protocol. We banned the chemicals, we shared the technology, and today the ozone layer is actively healing. It is concrete proof that global environmental diplomacy works.

In 2015, nearly every country in the world agreed to cooperate in the Paris Agreement framework. Prior to that, zero countries had formal net zero targets. Today, over 83 per cent of the global economy is covered by net zero pledges. Solar and wind installations have far outpaced forecasts made in 2015, with clean energy sources now generating over 40 per cent of global electricity. Cooperation is happening now through trade, economics and shared technology. The blueprint for global success exists. We've healed our atmosphere before, and we're entirely capable of doing it again.

On to the third argument: mitigation makes adaptation cheaper and more effective. When we discuss climate action, we often treat cutting emissions and building resilience as two separate, competing line items in a budget. The reality is that these two strategies are bound by a strict economic hierarchy. Mitigation is what makes adaptation affordable, effective and physically possible.

Consider a practical example: flood defences. If global mitigation limits sea level rise to a moderate, predictable level, protecting a coastal city is a standard civil engineering project. But if we fail to mitigate, the engineering problem changes entirely. We transition from building slightly higher concrete walls to requiring massive, multi-billion-pound storm surge barriers. The UK government's analysis on the economic opportunities of climate adaptation highlights this exact trap. It notes that climate damages

could cost up to 8 per cent of UK GDP by the 2070s under current international climate policies. Globally, unmitigated climate change threatens to permanently dent global GDP. Unmitigated climate change will quickly outpace our financial capacity to adapt.

So the choice isn't between spending money on mitigation or spending money on adaptation. It is between paying a manageable cost now or paying an escalating and potentially unaffordable cost later. This is why mitigation isn't a distraction from adaptation. It is the most important investment we can make to keep adaptation financially viable later.

The opposition: living standards, and which comes first

The fourth argument: mitigation does not require a drop in living standards. The belief that climate mitigation requires a lower standard of living is an outdated myth. Real-world economic data shows that we can successfully separate economic wealth from environmental damage through technology. There are three strands to this. First, absolute decoupling is real. Over 40 advanced nations have grown their economies by up to 66 per cent since 1990, while actively cutting their CO₂ emissions by 30 to 50 per cent. This holds true even when factoring in the carbon from imported goods. Second, technology: global investment in renewables, grid storage and electric vehicles now reaches 2.2 trillion annually, exactly double the fossil fuel spending.

And thirdly, the sacrifices are minority luxuries. True lifestyle friction is confined to non-essential habits of the wealthy elite. A mere 1 per cent of the global population causes 50 per cent of commercial aviation emissions. Swapping frequent flights for digital conferencing or zero-emission rail does not degrade human wellbeing. It simply rationalises luxury for a sustainable future.

So to conclude, viewing this as a choice between adaptation and mitigation is false. We must do both. However, we must recognise their hierarchy. Adaptation is what we do to survive the damage that we've already locked in. Mitigation is what we do to ensure we still have a world left to adapt to. If we fail to mitigate, we will quickly reach a tipping point where adaptation becomes physically impossible. We cannot engineer our way out of an unliveable planet. Thank you.

Roman vineyards and an oscillating climate

Mr President, I would support most of what the proposer has proposed, but not actually for the reasons that he's cited. It has been well established, I have mentioned it in these rooms, that it was hotter in Roman times than it is now. I won't go into the vast details, but it has been done by tracking known Roman vineyards against modern vineyards. We know where modern vineyards are; you need archaeology to work out where the Romans had them. They were beyond Hull in Roman times. We are very far north. We should be a lot colder than we are now, but there you are. It got colder as we got to the mini ice age, which is around about the industrial revolution, and vineyards ended up on either side of the Thames estuary and no more. They've now got back, but not beyond Hull.

So we're going to expect to get warmer. Whatever you do with your climate business, the climate is changing, and it will get warmer anyway. So you've got to therefore mitigate the warming climate, and I'm going to suggest it's a waste of time trying to end that trend to get warmer. If you put a wet towel around your head and put yourself in a darkened room and work out that it gets warmer as you go back beyond the ice age, all the arguments about climate change disappear.

Now, another bit of evidence is that a few years ago New Scientist published, and they like to do things like this, they like to challenge established theories, which is unusual for publications, which usually stick to what people already think is happening. They published a chart showing 15 occasions when it was both warmer than it is now and colder than it is now, in what is called the warm interglacial period

of the ice ages. We are in an ice age, and there's a warm period. The ice age community said the ice is going to start coming out again, so it's going to get colder. But I think that's beyond any concept that we can put in our minds. I think the timescales are too long for that.

But it certainly got colder as you went to the mini ice age, and warmer as you go back from the mini ice age to around zero AD. And New Scientist has published 15 occasions when it has been both warmer than it is now and colder than it is now. So I would say, by simple logic, ladies and gentlemen, that whatever happens it is going to go on getting warmer, and you've got to put up with it. You have to mitigate that it's going to get warmer, regardless of what you're going to do about it, which I don't think is anything. We are in an oscillating climate anyway. Therefore, mitigation. That's all you can do. You have a question?

You said New Scientist found 15 occasions when it got warmer, and 15 occasions when it's been colder. But you're saying that it's just going to get warmer. Why wouldn't it get colder?

Because we're not up to the Roman level of heat here, so we are not up to the maximum. There have been 15 occasions when it has been warmer than it is now.

But there are 15 occasions when it's been colder.

There are 15 occasions when it was colder, and the last time was the mini ice age, roughly between the late 1600s and the 1850s or 60s. That was the last ice age. The Thames in London froze over from about November to March, regularly, every year.

I was a member of CND at a time when you could buy a "nuclear power, no thanks" badge in practically every language under the sun. I've since learned that probably whatever we use, there'll be climate problems. There were people complaining about coal when that came out. Then we had the business about fracking. So whatever power we use, I think it's probably like a cancer. It can be treated if it's caught early, and I'm afraid it is not early. It's probably too late now. We just have to adapt, and use as little power as we can. Thank you.

Nepal, the global south and energy sovereignty

Good evening, everyone. Happy summer. The Nepalese haven't had such a great summer, have they? Did you see the pictures? Words or phrases have been used such as "we'll have to just accept it, put up with it", but we're not suffering the consequences. It's the global south. We've all seen the video footage. The UN said that in 2023 Nepal's mountains had lost close to a third of their ice in just over 30 years due to global heating. So that's visual imagery telling us of the catastrophe that awaits the global south, probably not the global north. We've got the finances to deal with it.

I think the answer to the motion is probably both. It's got to be both, right? But I don't know what we can do about it. The UK is responsible for 1 per cent of emissions or something like that. The EU is 7 per cent, but the big ones are the US, India and China. If we want to do anything about it, how are we going to influence them? I'm reminded of 2000. George W. Bush won, and Al Gore lost. Al Gore, the big climate campaigner. How different the world might have been had he not accepted those chads. Do you remember the chad count?

But the CFCs and the Montreal Protocol are a good example. Reagan, by the way, was president then. It's a great example of how the world can get together. I think that, however, was also a last-minute thing. I'm not an expert, but I think it was.

The big point really is energy sovereignty. We were relying on the Middle East, as the proposer said. Now we're relying on Norway, and we're also relying on the US. It's getting ever more expensive, and

so the real driver for energy sovereignty has got to be clean energy. Energy sovereignty is the big thing, right? And so that's why we need to go towards clean energy, sun, wind, whatever, because it's a losing battle if we keep importing.

But it doesn't look like that's the direction we're going, with Mr Donald J. Trump and this whole thing with Iran, trying to control the Strait of Hormuz: moves to try and control global energy supplies, to sustain hegemony and to try and control the development of other countries, especially China.

Venezuela, right? Where now a non-compliant government has been replaced by a compliant government, and coerced, we learned this week, into giving away a third of Venezuela's oil resources for the next 100 years, in a deal that's very similar to the way the British coerced Hong Kong out of China. So it looks like the strategy of the powers that be is going to be all hydrocarbons. We're going in the wrong direction. So, to sum up, my position is a bit of both, but we do need to focus on energy sovereignty and therefore clean energy. Otherwise, it's a losing battle.

Cumulative emissions and the duty to lead

I want to be a bit provocative. Adaptation and mitigation are always a dichotomy to an extent; they always seem to collide with each other. Go back six years, to 2020. Governments were looking at net zero, at putting down some targets. Something else was happening back then, which was Covid. Back then, people were saying, "Look, we need to open right now. We should stop the lockdown, because otherwise the economy will just go bust. No one is going to make money. We need to go and do our own business, and whoever is there is going to suffer the consequences of us just opening up, and that's fine. That's life."

This is the same kind of discussion that is happening with climate change today: saying we just cannot solve the issue, we just need to let things go, whoever is going to survive is going to survive. This is the same kind of discussion that will also happen with AI at some point, when we are going to say, "Oh, it's just AI. Things need to go the way they are supposed to go. It's just the market."

In my opinion, when we come to whether we should do more adaptation or more mitigation: just last week, the UN published a report called Overshooting 1.5. The foreword of that report states that even though global warming is set to cross 1.5, likely within the next few years, the goal remains limiting the warming. However, the goal must now be approached from above, while the world adapts to intensifying climate impacts. Here is the important part: every fraction of a degree avoided, and every year by which overshoot is shortened, saves lives, protects ecosystems and reduces economic losses. Extreme weather events, glacier melt, ecosystem losses and sea level rise will only intensify above 1.5. Human health, food, water security, cities and infrastructure will come under increased strain.

So when we're talking about net zero, are we only talking about trying to reduce emissions, about the impact on the energy system? It's more about how you can mitigate so that later you're not going to pay higher prices, because there would be higher inflation. In my opinion, the risk from climate change is not really from flooding or from storms. The risk from climate change is actually that we are going to miss food security. Food security is going to be lacking, and there will be higher inflation. That's where you will see the higher prices that we pay.

There was a point made before about what we can actually do as a nation. The UK, yes, emits less than 1 per cent. Other European countries are the same, like my own country. But historically, the UK has been the one that started emitting the earliest. Climate change is a cumulative phenomenon. It's not like today you emit 100, tomorrow you emit zero, and then you can start doing whatever you want. You need to look at climate change as cumulative emissions of CO₂, and the UK has been one of the biggest contributors to those emissions. Not just the UK; also my own country.

So how can we say to developing countries, to India, to Nigeria, to all these nations that are coming out of poverty, where each percentage point of GDP means people getting out of poverty: on what basis can we say, "Oh look, I'm not going to do anything because the UK is 1 per cent. What can the UK do?" It's a global phenomenon. The nations that started emitting earlier should be the ones leading the global discussions. I'm done. Thank you.

A tragedy of the commons

So I'm actually split. I agree with the proposer in the short term, but with the opposer in the long term. That seems oxymoronic, but there we are. I think the first thing to get out of the way is that adaptation and mitigation assume that there's one agent at play, and that's not really true. The whole problem with climate change is that it's really a tragedy of the commons.

And with that, we can focus on a core issue for us, which is Britain's competitiveness in things like industrial energy. We talk a lot about what Britain can be if we handicap ourselves in terms of energy cost, and we already really have. We are an example to the world of what not to do if you want to be competitive in industry. Our energy costs are triple what they are in the US. And in terms of actually being effective at producing energy, in the examples you gave, we sometimes have to rely on the French, which is never a good sign for anyone.

Now, it is a fact that in the near term we are going to need gas, and I think if we are going to use gas, it should probably be our own. I understand that that seems to be moving backwards in a sense, but it's not really. The idea that it's moving backwards is really just an emotional lens on it. If gas is going to be used, it might as well be the stuff that we actually own.

Regarding the CFC argument, I think it's a bit flawed, because ultimately countries didn't give up anything by giving up CFCs. It would be a very different bargain if you asked China to give up its use of coal. And so we have to be honest about what we could realistically ask countries to do, given the game theory of it.

Beyond that, I think that we are absolutely unwilling to give up things about our lifestyle. Who is actually willing to not be able to buy fruit at certain times of the year? I'm not, right? And that fruit has to come from somewhere. It has to come on a big ship, run on fossil fuels, unless we bring back sails. And I think bringing up the statistics about how much Britain actually emits, 0.7 per cent or so, omits our complicity in the emissions generated elsewhere. There is clothing in this room created in the East, in factories consuming fossil fuels. We can't discount all of the things that we import that used fossil fuels, of which there is a lot, and I think we would be surprised by how much we gain in our lifestyles through that.

All that being said, we are going to use fossil fuels, and it is going to end badly if it continues ad infinitum. And so I think the more pragmatic way to think about it is: what can we do within the time between now and the end? I think Hinkley Point C is the ultimate testament to our failure, compared to something like China, which currently has in the works, I think, 36 nuclear power plants, all of prefabricated modular design, and we can't even build one. What can we do with this time in which we have to use fossil fuels? That is my question, and I feel it answers the motion somewhat. That's it.

Fusion, and the power of example

I really like the energy point that you made. I think nuclear fusion is something that hasn't really been mentioned, that we can look into. For those who aren't aware, it's basically the opposite of fission. With fission, you get big atoms and you split them into smaller atoms, and it's really easy to go wrong. You get nuclear bombs, and you get Fukushima or Chernobyl. Whereas fusion is really hard to do wrong,

and it's ridiculous in terms of how much energy you can make. For example, the amount of energy one human uses in their lifetime could come from fusion with maybe a bathtub of seawater and a laptop battery.

One thing that's quoted a lot with fusion is the joke that it's always 30 years away. But right now there's ITER in France, which is a running fusion reactor, and there's one being built in the US which is not a scientific project; they're doing it commercially, to power some of the AI things nearby. I think investing in fusion is somewhere, energy-wise, that we really need to look, because of the upsides. Ultimately, if we could get it working, it would be cheaper, and there's greater potential because it doesn't produce such bad by-products as some other sources of energy.

I like the point made earlier about the UK doing stuff in the past, because I think it's important to set a precedent. You might say that we only have 0.7 per cent of the world's emissions, but if we were able to massively cut down on it, and maybe even get to net zero, then it would be hard for other countries' governments, bigger governments, to say, "We can't do it; it's not viable," because the UK was able to do it. I think the UK taking steps further would potentially create more of a global movement that would help us counteract climate change, as opposed to pretending that because we don't do much now, there's no point in dealing with it.

I also think there's the principle of climate change and global inequality, where the rich countries like China and the US use all the fossil fuels and produce all of this, and it's the poorer countries that feel the negatives. I just think that's unfair, and it sets a bad precedent globally, where the richer countries are able to exploit and do what they want, and they don't feel the consequences of it. Only now, this summer, are we feeling the consequences, with the heatwaves and the hosepipe bans. Whereas Bhutan, which is near Nepal, is net zero, and Nepal's having things like that happen. It's not a local thing; it's a global thing, and the UK taking steps towards that would be able to incite a global movement, in my opinion.

Consumerism, local production and war

I'm not used to speaking in public, so I apologise in advance. This is a debating society, I understand, so there needs to be a controversy. If we agreed on everything, then there would be no debate. But I think it's already been mentioned by various people that it's not either or; it's both. We need to think about adaptation, and we need to think about mitigation. It's more about the extent to which we focus on one or the other. I think the analogy of the patient is a good one. We have to think about the short term, but we have to address the root cause.

It's also been mentioned that, even though here in the West, let's say the UK and Europe, we don't produce as much of the emissions proportionally, we do a lot of the consumption that produces those emissions elsewhere. So I think we still have not only a moral responsibility but a practical one, and that has to do with the way we live: the system, the economic system. This is a consumerist society, based on people being made to feel that they have a need, and that they need to satisfy it by buying something. I think we are so immersed in that consumerist society that we just don't realise it, and it seems normal, but maybe it's not that normal.

They tell us the fashion has changed, so we have to throw away clothes and buy new ones. Or my washing machine breaks down, and I have no clue what's wrong, but all I know is that it's cheaper to buy a new one than to have it looked at, and maybe it's only one thing.

Would you support the UK's emissions going up by, say, 5 per cent because we did more manufacturing, if it meant global emissions reduced by, say, 10 per cent because we stopped importing from China and elsewhere? So the question is: would you increase local emissions to reduce emissions

globally?

To me, producing locally when it makes economic sense would be a good thing. I don't understand how the UK exports beef and imports beef. Presumably the cows are the same. So there are things that could be produced locally. Maybe economically somebody would make more of a profit if it's brought from the other side of the world. But even if it's possibly a bit more expensive, it would make sense to produce locally in terms of security. You're not dependent on another part of the world, and for emissions as well.

And since CND was mentioned tonight, my humble proposition would be that one of the things that could be done to tackle global warming would be to stop wars, because I think that's the most obvious one. Stop destroying things in order then to build things. I think that's a real waste. So, thank you.

Per capita emissions and British soft power

I'll try to keep this brief. I wanted to focus specifically on the argument that Britain accounts for just 1 per cent. Yes, in absolute numbers that's true, but we need to look at per capita emissions between countries to understand their contribution. We often make fun of Taylor Swift for using private jets, and we criticise Leonardo DiCaprio for being a hypocrite. Why? Because one individual is producing many times the carbon dioxide emissions of other people.

Second, there's an underlying pessimism about Britain. The United Kingdom has always been a country that's punched well above its weight. It is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It is leading global debates on AI safety. It plays such an important role, and it can potentially play a much more important role in the single biggest crisis that humanity has probably faced.

Building on this, I think there is a risk of retreating, and this is a thread I see in other debates, on other issues as well: this retreat into a little island mentality. We're just this little island off the coast of Europe. We don't matter. We don't count. No, that's simply not true. Its soft power is enormously high. People care about the royal family. They care about its actors. It has the capacity to influence the world in a positive direction.

You also talked about the financial resources it possesses. When you have relatively novel technologies, it's the wealthy countries that need to create a demand for them. That in turn incentivises R&D, and once those problems are figured out, we can move to mass production, bring down unit costs, and then the poorer countries can jump in. If you've read about this recently, Pakistan had a major electricity crisis, and it was often going to the IMF to get money to import fuel. It has pretty much cracked the problem. It just imported a bunch of cheap Chinese solar panels, and figured it out. So I think the UK has a very important role to play. That's it.

The cost of climate change mitigation, and the cost of inaction

Thank you very much. First of all, a fact that needs to be cleared up: this idea that there was a period of human history which was hotter than today is categorically false. There may have been very select, specific parts of the world that were hotter, but as a whole, the statistics show that for the past 1,000 years there has never been a period hotter than today, and not just by a little bit, but by a huge margin. We are 1.4 degrees above the pre-industrial average. Even if you consider that the immediate pre-industrial period was in fact a mini ice age, the period before it, roughly before 1600, was only about 0.2 degrees hotter on average. So that's the difference: 0.2 degrees hotter than the mini ice age, versus 1.4 degrees now, and a consistently rising trend.

The proposer asked a number of questions about climate change mitigation, such as the cost, who is going to pay and which industries will survive. Thankfully, we have answers to all of that. In terms of

cost, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that net zero will cost 1.4 trillion pounds over 30 years. That's the gross cost. The net cost, because of all the efficiency gains that would be obtained from net zero, would be 344 billion pounds over 30 years, which seems like a pretty damn good bargain, especially when you consider there's about 17.5 billion in indirect subsidies to the oil and gas industry.

The cost of not doing anything is even more stratospheric. A study for the House of Lords estimated that climate change currently costs the UK economy 1.1 per cent of GDP. In 2050, that's going to be 3.3 per cent of GDP, and by 2100 it's going to be 7.4 per cent of GDP. These numbers come from Lord Stern, from the LSE's climate change institute, or whatever it's called. The OBR also said that inaction will mean UK debt reaching 290 per cent of GDP by the end of the century. So once we weigh the cost of doing net zero against the cost of not doing net zero, I think it's pretty obvious that net zero is cost-effective.

So who pays? Well, the state is obviously going to have to pay for a lot of this. Curiously, no one complains about who has to pay when the defence budget goes up. That means taxpayers. The private sector will also pay, except the private sector is going to benefit from a lot of these same efficiency gains, so in the end it might not even pay that much. Which industries will survive? Well, pretty much all of them, except if your industry is entirely based on polluting, and there aren't that many. Even the oil and gas industry will survive under net zero. No one has said that it's going to be the end of those industries. In a way, this is like the builders of horse carts complaining, when cars are invented, that their industry is not going to survive.

Now, what about adaptation? Why is no one asking what the cost of adaptation is? The answer is because no one knows. The effects are absolutely unknown. Currently, the best estimate is that the global temperature is going to rise by 1.8 degrees. But that's the most optimistic one. It could well be 2 degrees. It could well be 3 degrees, with absolutely catastrophic, if not borderline apocalyptic, effects. What about things like the collapse of the Atlantic current? What if we spend all this money to make Britain resilient to heat, and it turns into another Conan the Barbarian ice age? Well, actually, no, Conan was pretty hot. Or was it? Newfoundland.

New Finland.

Yes, it turns into New Finland. And guess who's going to pay for all that? You all. Private companies are not going to give you a better price if all the effects of climate change happen. The state is still going to have to spend, and that comes from your taxpayer money, but you're also going to spend as a consumer on adapting, because private companies will not bail you out of this one. Even with this optimistic 1.8 degrees, the idea is that if we do mitigation, that can be brought down to 1.5, which is better than nothing. It avoids perhaps some more catastrophic damage to the environment. So just remember: this year was the hottest year of your lives, but it's going to be the coldest year for the rest of your lives.

And I just want to reinforce one final point, which a number of people have made: the idea that the UK has to set an example for the rest of the world. I'm really surprised that a lot of people who are against net zero, who are the patriots and the nationalists here, suddenly think that when it comes to climate change, maybe the UK should just chill out and not be a leader, not punch above its weight. If you want leadership, this is the way to do it, because this is the emergency of our generation. Thank you.

Living more local lives

I'm in favour of the proposal, but I'll stand here. Just really interesting points. On mitigation versus adaptation, I think we should definitely try and mitigate as much as we can. I simply don't know enough to know how optimistic to be. I think our National Grid's in a bit of a mess, it sounds like from the

proposer. It's not great that we're telling solar companies to stop, and paying them 3 billion a year. I'm sure mitigation will work in the long run, but I think it's so in the lap of the gods whether global governments are going to cooperate rather than work against each other. We can't hope for that.

And the reason I'm in favour of adaptation is, boy, we could do with some adaptation in Britain. We are so unadapted to climate change in the way that we live our lives. We are obsessed, and I'm getting this from, basically, I'm single, I'm on Hinge, I see the profiles. We are bloody obsessed with food and travel. Travel this, travel that, "give me tips for Bosnia". We spend half our bloody lives on an easyJet, flying to places because it looks cool, and we need to stop. We need to live, truthfully, and this sounds miserable and tough, much more local lives. Maybe bring back the regional railways that were lost in the Beeching cuts, and encourage cheap travel to different parts of the UK. Stay local. Stop bloody travelling.

The second thing we need to stop is food bloggery, food obsession. "I'm getting pomegranate on this," and all that. Where does it come from? It's so unsustainable. Buy local, basic food, and learn how to grow your own food. And the third, kind of frivolous one: we're obsessed with wasting our time and our brain health on AI and on our phones, and this is basically fuelling the demand for the data centres. As I was discussing with the guy at the back, we need to start using old A to Z map books to get around London.

It seems like we're doing the complete opposite of that, with frivolous use of AI on a personal level and at work. At work it seems to be encouraged. I'm constantly encouraged to use Claude to translate a wordy email into three sentences of bullet points, and then someone makes three sentences of bullet points into a really wordy email and sends it back. It's a kind of AI bullshit going on here, and it's data centres, data centres, data centres. Water. And it's fuelled by our demand. So, on an individual and community level, we need to re-evaluate how climate-friendly our lives are, and how we can live more climate-friendly lives without being miserable.

And how can we all do that by ourselves? Can we do that through social change? The sad thing is, I'm afraid we're going to have to do what we do with cars and just price people off the roads. We're going to have to price people out of AI. We're going to have to price people out of wanky food and prep. We're going to have to price people out of cheap flights to Malaga. Sorry, unless I go off and think of a better, fairer adaptation strategy. But I do think we're dreadfully badly unadapted. We are like Germans in 1910, with no idea of the kind of turbulence that's coming, sitting and enjoying Mozart. I'm done.

Public goods, private goods and Indonesian nickel

I'm standing in the wrong place, but it's just for convenience. I don't know how to solve this problem. I think you can take two different lenses to it. If you take an international lens and you think we're all going to cooperate, then yes, mitigation is the way to go. But mitigation is a public good. If we, as the UK, only emit 1 per cent of global emissions, but we spend a billion on mitigation, are we only getting 1 per cent of that benefit back for our spend? Some have pitched that we should take a leadership position, that there's some sort of multiplier effect that will lead other actors in the world to follow our endearing example of how to mitigate climate change. I'm not so sure I buy that.

If you take adaptation, that's a private good. If we put air conditioners in our houses, we will feel that benefit ourselves. Some will say, okay, but it's all about climate change; it's about reducing energy consumption. I'm not so sure that's the right way to think about it. I think there is a world in which we've got clean and abundant energy, and we need to move away from where that comes from currently. Right now, the Far East, China, produces the majority of solar panels. That's where the manufacture of solar panels is. So how can we be arguing that we should be using all of that technology here when they're

controlling it and taking all the benefit there? Should we be trying to create that sort of industry here? Is that how we get away from the mitigation problem?

Another problem of international coherence: when we look at this debate on climate change, I think we focus on CO₂ as the only thing we emit that's unwanted in the world. When you look at what else is emitted, you'll see that the players that emit a lot of CO₂ are not playing with the same mentality that the West would. I'll give you one anecdotal example from a different industry: nickel.

You get two types of nickel deposit in the world: nickel sulphides and nickel laterites. The sulphide deposits, we in the West have extracted all of ours. We know exactly how to do that. The laterites are based in Indonesia, and the Chinese cracked the code on how to process them. They use a high-pressure acid leach process, which means they're adding a lot of acid to that ore body, and what do they do with the acid? They just pump it into the ocean.

So the reality is the Chinese are willing to drop the price of nickel to the point that they benefit from it, and the rest of the world is going to suffer because they're polluting a global ocean. So you're going to stand here and say that we should be mitigating as the UK, when we know that the Chinese are just going to emit? What are we really doing? We're just displacing that emission from here to there. Does that really assuage your moral obligation? Should we not be spending on adaptation, which is where we're going to feel the benefits here as the UK?

If you take that lens of the globe versus us as an individual country, I think you end up in two very different places, which makes it quite a difficult problem, because there is no solution now. How do you convince every player to operate in a cooperative manner towards the same end, when they clearly are not interested in the same end? Some people want to grow the economy. We might not want to grow our economy, when you look at how we tax ourselves and all the other policies we put in place as a government. So it's a bit of a mixed bag. Which way do you go? Which is the right solution to the actual problem? I think we all agree we would like to live in a beautiful climate. How do we actually get ourselves to that point?

It's really difficult to convince the global body that is all of the nations to act in a coherent manner. I think it's the US that didn't meet its climate accords, right? They signed up to it and then walked away, and never did anything about it. So they convince people to go, and then they go back and play for their own best interest. How does the UK sit in that space and do the right thing? I'm not so sure about putting the burden on UK taxpayers to try and move the needle on global emissions when others don't do anything. I don't think that's the right way for us as an island.

And another anecdotal thought: if you look at CO₂ emissions specifically, how much is emitted from volcanoes? We've seen this massive volcano that's erupted out in Indonesia. How much is that going to emit over the next couple of weeks and months? Is that going to wipe out two or three years of our sacrifice? Is that really a sacrifice you want to make?

Volcanic ash, climate change mitigation and who pays for adaptation

Are you aware that volcanic dust also reflects sunlight back out and can cool the planet?

Well, I thought CO₂ was the problem.

But it counterbalances it.

Does it?

It does, temporarily.

So should we then put more volcanic ash into the atmosphere?

Yes.

I'm sure the Indonesians and all their cancelled flights are going to absolutely love that solution. Again, you're outsourcing the cost to a specific, localised part of the world, which I'm not sure is the coherent solution to a global problem. You have to win that collaboration, and get all the nations to buy into the same vision.

Who is going to pay for the adaptation costs of poor countries? Do they have to pay for it themselves, even though they're not responsible for the majority of emissions?

Well, if they're the ones that are going to get impacted, should they not solve their own problem? I would love for you to have this argument with the Chinese, who are the main cause of this problem right now. So good luck convincing them to go and fund the poorer nations.

The US has been, cumulatively, the country that is...

Again, good luck convincing them. Good luck. I support you. Go and have that argument with the US.

Now you're switching your own answer. Who will pay for the adaptation costs of poor countries?

They'll have to pay for it themselves.

To say nothing else of what is practical, or what has to be: do you think what you said just there, that they should have to pay for it, is flatly fair? Like a mother explaining ethics to a child: do you think that is fair?

Who said the world was fair?

I'm just being blunt.

Who said the world is fair? No, no, I agree with you. It's probably not fair if they are the victim of some mega trade around the globe, but the reality is, if your country is flooding, you should build a wall.

I don't care about the reality. I have no interest in the rest of this question. My question relates only to this: do you think it's fair?

Well, the answer is obviously it's not fair.

What do you think adaptation for the UK would be like, then? Say the UK does nothing. No one does anything. Everyone is on their own. What does adaptation look like for the UK?

It means surviving, right? What do you want it to mean?

What do I want it to mean?

What do you think adaptation means? No one's stood up here and said exactly what adaptation looks like at this point in time.

Poverty before climate policy

Okay, so now I think we get to the crux of the matter, because we can all worry about what little old England is going to do about it, but really, what we do is going to be negligible. We have a much, much bigger problem. We are in a climate crisis; we all agree with that. Everything that everybody has said this evening, I totally agree with. But the UK isn't going to solve it. China isn't going to solve it. India isn't going to solve it.

Now, we have a bunch of countries with very, very poor people. Over 50 per cent of the population of the world survives on just over \$8 a day. They're not worried about adapting to climate change; they're not worried about mitigating climate change. They are worried about basic survival. We are in a very fortunate position. We live in one of the largest, most comfortable societies that there is, regardless of what you read or see on the news every day. But if you are a politician working for a government in one of those very poor countries, you might pay some lip service to environmental issues, but you're fundamentally worried about trying to improve the lives of those people.

They're not going to be sitting there thinking, "Shit, the Brits are doing their little bit of net zero. That's great. Why aren't we doing our bit?" They're worried about improving the quality of their lives, because they think, why can't I have what the Brits have got? Who would disagree with that? Would you disagree with that? No, you wouldn't.

I tell you what: we will all leave here this evening, we'll get on some big jumbo jet, and we'll go off to some third world country. We'll get a lovely little luxury coach into some field somewhere, and we'll say to some guy, "Listen, what do you think about environmental change and the impact of fossil fuels?" And they'll flip you the bird. That's what I think they'll do. They'll say, "I want my life to be improved." And the politicians sitting in third world countries are saying, "Our priority isn't environmental change." It's a luxury for us to be sitting here talking about environmental impacts. People are dying of poverty, and we sit here talking about adapting to climate change, about mitigating climate change. We are pathetic. Thank you.

Local adaptation, and a debt owed

Okay. Thank you very much for having me tonight, gentlemen. Some very interesting points all over. I do very strongly agree with the previous speaker: we are very pathetic, and we're in a very privileged position to be talking about what we can do, and even to have the emotional and mental space to consider this as something that we need to work on. I think realistically, overall, it has to be a bit of both, like we've said: mitigation on a large scale, but local adaptation is also very important, because I really do think that we're not mentally or spiritually prepared for how bad it's actually going to get.

Realistically, even if the whole world stopped all of its polluting today, we'd still have decades' worth of greenhouse gases and environmental impact to work off to get back to a healthy climate. But I do think that the West owes it to the developing world. The reason that we're even here today, as we are, this country and America as well, is the exploitation of the world, and that's being pushed off onto other countries, directly through polluting and sending all of our rubbish to Malaysia, or, like what's happening in Nepal, as an indirect impact of our actions.

As was said earlier, this is going to be the coldest year we've ever experienced, and the year with the most water in our reservoirs, and the year with the most food yields from our crops. So we're going to have to think of something. We've known about the impacts of greenhouse gases on the environment for 120 or 130 years; the first paper about it was 130 years ago, and we've spent all this time and all this money to hide it and keep it a secret. So I don't have much hope, unfortunately, that we're going to do any meaningful mitigation.

So I think it is going to have to be local adaptation, where we have smaller communities who are able to help each other and give each other food and whatever we need. Because, yes, it's going to get bleak, guys. I know we said no travelling, but if you do want to see Venice before it sinks, you're going to have to get there quickly. So, yes, thank you very much, guys.

Closing for the opposition: gas prices, imports and energy sovereignty

We've talked quite a bit tonight about energy, in particular its cost and our reliance on it, and where it comes from. The UK has energy prices which are viewed as uncompetitive, primarily because we rely on gas. The UK sets the price according to the gas price, and that happens 98 per cent of the time in the UK, whereas in France it's 7 per cent and in Germany it's 24 per cent. So we need to continue using renewable sources, and think about how we structure the mechanisms to make sure that energy is priced affordably for everyone, so that we can transmit those benefits throughout the country.

Only 42 per cent of the wholesale energy cost comes from the actual energy itself. The rest comes from transmission, from taxes and those sorts of things. So linking high energy prices to renewables is false. Furthermore, in February 2026 the price of renewables was much lower than gas. We had solar at 65 pounds a megawatt, wind at 72 pounds, and gas at 89 to 100 pounds per megawatt. So it's clear to me that energy from renewable sources is the cheaper alternative in this day and age.

Then, talking about reliance: the proposition spoke about how we import electricity from France from time to time. In actual fact, we import electricity from France only 12 to 16 per cent of the time. It's very common practice, and it happens every single day of the year. Meanwhile, we import 43 per cent of our fossil fuels, and we're relying on the global price and the shocks that come with that. So I think renewables are a vote for energy sovereignty in the UK, so that we can take control of our energy and reduce the prices for everyone.

I agree with the speaker back there that we are pathetic, but not for the reasons he said. We can't stop flying around the world for our holidays. We can't stop living our carefree lives and focus on policies which actually make a difference and drive forward change. We are starting to see some of those policies. The UK will be introducing a carbon price similar to the EU's carbon border mechanism. That will mean that goods sold in the UK have a price attached to them to reflect the carbon that other countries have emitted in producing them. That will make those goods less competitive, and make goods made with renewable sources more competitive, and in that way we will encourage other countries to move along their own renewable transition.

One of the speakers spoke about their washing machine, and it being cheaper to replace it than to repair it. In the EU they have a right to repair act, so now all new appliances have to be repairable. They can no longer be built in such a way that you cannot repair them. So in that way, we're starting to build policies which bring forward change. So I ask everyone to stop sticking our heads in the sand, act now to mitigate and look towards the future.

Closing for the proposition: Britain's perspective, and Britain's weakness

Well, Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, a lot of this discussion has been about mitigation from the point of view of countries cooperating, and from a global perspective. I deliberately, when I started my speech, focused on the UK, because that is the perspective that we, as an audience here, have. We are in the UK. We know about the UK, so I concentrated on the UK as a common perspective. We don't know about the problems that other countries have. We don't know what their priorities are, what their problems might be. So it's highly presumptuous of us to talk about other countries and what they might or might not do.

Cooperation, for example. India has a very different economy to ours. India consumes a million tons of coal a day, and its carbon emissions have gone up 8 per cent. Now, they're not going to take any notice of us if we say, "Well, that's actually not a very good thing, to consume that much coal." Why would they? China: 49.7 per cent of its energy has come from coal in the last year. They're making great strides with renewables and what have you, but China is not going to listen to us if we say, "Well, actually, you shouldn't be mining coal; you shouldn't be opening a new coal-fired power station every two weeks."

Why should they? So, frankly, to argue that we should be setting an example and other countries are going to follow it is just hogwash. It's nonsense.

We are making ourselves weaker by all the taxes that we impose on our energy generation, and the industries that are going to the wall. We are ultimately making ourselves more dependent on imports, and weaker, because we produce less here domestically. And frankly, the more stuff that comes by sea into our ports, the more vulnerable we are, and the weaker as a country we are. So to argue that it's a virtue is nonsense.

Up to now, we have concentrated on reducing carbon emissions. We have neglected and ignored adaptation: flood defences, more reservoirs, nuclear power, things that would actually help us. That's become the poor relation, and it's about time that we stopped thinking about saving the world and reducing our carbon footprint even further, and concentrated on what is going to help us in future.

Closing for the proposition: subsidies, pipelines and fairness

My friend over there quotes figures from the OBR and the LSE. Well, I'm not surprised; economists always get it wrong, and frankly the OBR and the LSE are just about the least reliable sources of information and figures you could possibly imagine. They're always getting it wrong. And my friend over there mentioned nuclear fusion. Yes, but it's still at the experimental stage. There is a reactor in France. There is one in the USA. If they can get it going commercially, wonderful. But it's still very experimental. It'll take years to come to fruition, and I'm more concerned about what is happening today.

The opposer talks about energy, and says that wind and solar are much cheaper, and it's all set by the gas price. No, it isn't, because the subsidies that go into wind and solar are enormous. To set up a wind farm, the initial costs are huge, absolutely enormous, and the companies that do that want a guaranteed price that will allow them to recoup their investment and make a profit over 15 to 20 years. The subsidies that are hidden inside the prices are enormous for both wind and solar, and that is what he is deliberately ignoring.

Yes, there is an international gas price. If we were to stop taxing our own oil and gas industries to death and actually use our own fields in the North Sea, it wouldn't make a difference to the overall price, that is true, but it would provide jobs, which would pay taxes, and it would make us more self-sufficient and less dependent on getting it from countries like Norway.

And incidentally, Norway supplies us by a pipeline under the sea, which could easily be disrupted at any time by an unfriendly power, just as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Poland was disrupted not that long ago. Quite easy to do, and that would put us into dire straits, because it would cut off our source from Norway. That sort of thing makes us weaker. We should be concentrating on our own resources and beefing them up, instead of taxing them to death.

And a friend over here talked about fairness. There was this question that came up about poorer countries, and who should pay for adaptation for them. This strange idea about fairness: life is not fair. Fairness is a concept that we have invented. When we feel that life is not very favourable for us, we say, "Oh, it's not fair." Frankly, fairness doesn't exist in life. I can tell you that from personal experience. Fairness is simply an idea that we have conjured up from somewhere. It's completely irrelevant to this sort of discussion.

So, thank you, Mr Chairman. We need to concentrate on this country and our own adaptation to climate change, because whether we like it or not, climate change is here now, and we have to cope with it. All these things that we've done to try to mitigate it, and all the conferences and everything, haven't stopped

it. It's still coming, and we just have to adapt to it, whether we like it or not.

The vote on climate change mitigation

We have to see which way the house is standing tonight. So let me reread the motion: climate policy should now focus on adaptation, not mitigation. All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed. You can abstain. And abstentions. Right. So we have had a shift, and it's an extremely close vote: by a razor-thin margin, seven in favour, eight against, five abstentions. The motion has not carried.