

Jane Hunt MP



House of Commons

22 January 2021

Dear local residents,

Thank you to those who have contacted me about the *Trade Bill*.

The [Trade Bill](#) is an important piece of legislation which has a number of practical functions. The UK has been working to reach continuity agreements with the countries that we currently trade with through EU trade deals. The Bill will enable these continuity agreements to be embedded into UK law so that the agreements can be fully implemented.

Having left the EU, the UK is now complying with the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Government Procurement as an independent member. The Bill's provisions will make sure the UK can implement procurement obligations under the agreement, ensuring continued access to £1.3 trillion per year of global procurement opportunities for UK businesses. The Bill will also facilitate the creation of a Trade Remedies Authority to deliver a new UK trade remedies framework, which among other things will include protections for UK businesses from unfair trade practices or unforeseen import surges.

It is important to make clear that the *Trade Bill* is a continuity Bill, and its functions are largely different from the Government's future trade agreements programme. For example, the Bill cannot be used to implement new free trade agreements with countries such as the US. Instead, it simply enables the free trade agreements that the EU had signed with third countries before the UK exited the EU.

I know a number of local residents have specific concerns about the Bill and future trade agreements and I have addressed these in turn below.

NHS

I would like to assure you, that the NHS is already protected by specific carve outs, exceptions and reservations in the trade agreements the EU signed with third countries before the UK left the EU. Ministers have no intention of lowering standards in transitioned trade agreements – the very purpose of these agreements is to replicate as close as possible the effects of existing commitments in EU agreements. Indeed, none of the continuity agreements signed have resulted in standards being lowered.

I recognise the strength of feeling about the provisions seeking to protect the NHS in New Clause 17, which was debated in the House of Commons last year, and the more recent Amendment 11, which was tabled in the House of Lords. However, for what I believe are sensible and practical reasons, I did not support the amendments.

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I also want to be clear that no future trade agreement will be allowed to undermine the guiding principle of the NHS: that it is universal and free at the point of need. I welcome the Government's clear and absolute commitment that the NHS will be protected in any future trade agreement. Indeed, the price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table, nor will the services the NHS provides. This was a commitment in the [Manifesto](#) on which I stood.

Rigorous checks and balances on the Government's power to negotiate and ratify new agreements also already exist, including through the *Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010*. Trade agreements cannot by themselves make changes to our domestic law and any legislative changes required as a result of trade agreements, are subject to the separate scrutiny and approval of Parliament in the usual ways.

Food standards

I recognise the importance the public attaches to the UK's high standards of food production, and the unique selling point it provides for our farmers, whose high-quality produce is in demand around the world. I, therefore, welcome that the landmark [Agriculture Act](#) has now become law, and that the Government has been clear that, in trade negotiations, it will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare or food safety standards.

Without exception, all animal products imported into the UK under existing or future free trade agreements from all trading partners, including the EU and others, will have to meet our stringent food safety standards, as they do now. These standards have been built up over many years and have the trust of the public and the world. The Government will not adjust those standards to secure trade deals. Instead, the standards will be based on science and decided by the UK alone.

I also welcome that the Government has established a [Trade and Agriculture Commission](#). This is something I had pressed for and is a move supported by the National Farmers' Unions in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as Northern Ireland's Ulster Farmers' Union.

The Commission will ensure close engagement with the agriculture industry to help inform, shape and guide agricultural trade policy. It will be independently chaired by food safety expert Tim Smith, a former Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency. Within a fixed term, the Commission will consider trade policies that the Government should adopt to secure opportunities for UK farmers, producers and exporters. The Commission will also ensure the agriculture sector remains competitive and that animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined.

Furthermore, I am pleased that the Government is putting the Trade and Agriculture Commission on a statutory footing and has confirmed that the body will produce a report,

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to be laid in Parliament at the start of each 21-day scrutiny period, on the impact on animal welfare and agriculture arising from each new free trade deal.

Parliamentary Scrutiny

Parliament has an important role in debating and scrutinising the Government's domestic and foreign policies, and so I agree that it should be able to scrutinise trade policy and free trade agreements.

I, therefore, welcome that the Government has made a number of important steps to enhance Parliamentary scrutiny of trade policy, including sharing extensive and comprehensive information with Parliament ahead of negotiations with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

Public consultations have and will continue to be held prior to negotiations to inform the Government's approach. Ministers have also published their negotiating objectives prior to the start of trade talks and held open briefings for MPs and Peers.

Regular updates are also provided to Parliament on the progress of negotiations and Ministers have said that they will be engaging closely with the International Trade Committee and the Lords International Agreements Committee as negotiations progress.

There was some concern, however, that the amendment made in the House of Lords could have placed restrictions on the Government's ability to enter into treaty negotiations and to ratify treaties. Ministers have said that giving Parliament a veto over negotiating objectives would curtail the royal prerogative and would limit the flexibility to negotiate in the best interests of the UK. For these reasons, I could not support it.

As the UK continues to redevelop its trade policy capacity following our exit from the EU, I am very pleased to see increased engagement between the Government, Parliament and other interested parties to develop and strengthen means of scrutinising future trade agreements.

I hope that this information is helpful. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane".

Jane Hunt MP