



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Archbishop Stephen today spoke in the House of Lords during the debate on the King's Speech given at the State Opening of Parliament. The speech follows in full.

My Lords, on these benches I too want to express my sadness at the death of Lord Judge, and indeed offer prayers and condolences to his family, and with others look forward to the speeches of Lord Burnett of Maldon, Lord Houchen of High Leven, and Lord Bailey of Paddington.

I also want to make the focus of my speech devolution, particularly looking at devolution within regions of England. Not least because I think devolution and devolved government in this way allows us to seek consensus in our decision making, and therefore better able to take a longer view. Which, in turn is the best way of tackling some of the huge issues facing us mentioned in the gracious speech; the greening of the economy, poverty, and indeed criminal justice.

Yesterday, the order was laid by the government for the establishment of the Mayoral Combined Authority for York and North Yorkshire- the area where I live and serve. This is very very good news for the North, and is the first deal of its kind that includes a large rural area in combination with a small city, and therefore is an opportunity for a new model that does not require a big city for success.

I know that I don't need to tell this house about the benefits this kind of devolution. The understanding and representation of local needs allows for good value for the money spent, and is something we have often discussed in York and North Yorkshire. A regional view is required to understand its huge variety, its opportunities, but also its inequalities - and then address them.

What is needed, I believe in our government, is consensus and longer-term planning- the sort of thing that devolved government can deliver. Last week I met with some people who have been working on this in York and North Yorkshire. What struck me most, was the incredible renewed hopefulness, and togetherness that longer lasting change could be achieved. This will renew our regional identity, it will enable us to better face issues of huge inequality. And in turn, therefore, will tackle the hopelessness that so often leads to crime.

Although today's theme is not transport, it is inextricably bound up with the conversation about devolution. I welcome the designated powers and funding that are allocated as part of the deal that have been a success in other cities. However, transport is the most contentious part of all devolution work, and to state the obvious, the failure to join up the East and West in national scale transport projects remains a serious issue for those of us who live – but sometimes struggle to travel - across the north.

The Network North proposals given in lieu of HS2, and announced yesterday feel to me like an afterthought, and were announced so quickly they eluded consultation. They don't seem to point to a well-measured decision that prioritises levelling up or investment in the North. Although the gracious speech said that the most frequently taken journeys are prioritised, it is unfortunate that those journeys are most frequently made by

car. Whatever anyone feels about HS2, I would suggest that the contrast in functioning transport systems within regions, and between them, demonstrates a problem with the length of our view.

We have heard in the gracious speech the legislative ambitions of the government for the forthcoming session, many of which I look forward to engaging with, as do my fellow bishops on these benches, including the Media Bill. Although I am glad to see that the trailed measures over the weekend around homelessness were not brought forward, there are some other worrying inclusions, such as the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill, and the announcement of new oil and gas licenses. We on these benches will be looking at all of this in detail as it emerges.

What is missing from the gracious speech is any recognition of the serious hardship that families are currently facing.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's most recent statistics note almost a million children in destitution- triple that from 2017. The Trussell Trust are expecting their worst winter ever and are planning to provide more food parcels than ever before. We need to take a longer view.

We must stay awake to the persistent and debilitating inequalities that exist in our nation. We need to stay awake to the danger we're in as a nation of dividing communities with polarised voices. These things will only get better if we take a longer view, if we build cross party consensus, if we change the way we do our politics.

We look forward to taking opportunities to work together, in this house and in other places to engage with this as we move forward.

The contribution made by the Archbishop of York is published in full at [Hansard](#).

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