

Text of Boris Johnson's speech at the Conservative Party Conference

Good morning conference, I want to begin by thanking you for everything you did at the election, pounding the streets in the middle of winter, prodding leaflets through the letterbox and into the jaws of dogs, to save this country from socialism and to win this party the biggest election victory in a generation.

There is no one to clap or heckle, and I don't know about you but I have had more than enough of this disease that attacks not only human beings but so many of the greatest things about our country: our pubs, our clubs, our football, our theatre and all the gossipy gregariousness and love of human contact that drives the creativity of our economy.

So I want to thank you all for zooming in, and I can tell you that your government is working night and day to repel this virus, and we will succeed, just as this country has seen off every alien invader for the last thousand years and we will succeed by collective effort, by following the guidance and with the help of weekly and almost daily improvements in the medicine and the science, we will ensure that next time we meet it will be face to face and cheek by jowl, and we are working for the day when life will be back to normal, flying in a plane will be back to normal, and hairdressers will no longer look as though they are handling radioactive isotopes, and when we can go and see our loved ones in care homes, and when we no longer have to greet each other by touching elbows as in some giant national version of the Birdie dance.

I know the people of this country are going to defeat this virus because I have seen how the country has responded before, with the energy and self-sacrifice of the NHS, the care workers, the armed forces – the spirit that was incarnated in the bounding, boundless devotion of captain Tom Moore.

But after all we have been through it isn't enough just to go back to normal. We have lost too much. We have mourned too many.

We have been through too much frustration and hardship just to settle for the status quo ante – to think that life can go on as it was before the plague; and it will not. Because history teaches us that events of this magnitude – wars famines, plagues; events that affect the vast bulk of humanity, as this virus has – they do not just come and go.

They are more often than not the trigger for an acceleration of social and economic change, because we human beings will not simply content ourselves with a repair job.

We see these moments as the time to learn and to improve on the world that went before.

That is why this government will build back better.

And to explain what I mean by build back better, I will use a medical metaphor.

I have read a lot of nonsense recently, about how my own bout of Covid has somehow robbed me of my mojo. And of course this is self-evident drivel, the kind of seditious propaganda that you would expect from people who don't want this government to succeed, who wanted to stop us delivering Brexit and all our other manifesto pledges – and I can tell you that no power on earth was and is going to do that – and I could refute these critics of my athletic abilities in any way they want: arm-wrestle, leg-wrestle, Cumberland wrestle, sprint-off, you name it.

And yet I have to admit the reason I had such a nasty experience with the disease is that although I was superficially in the pink of health when I caught it I had a very common underlying condition.

My friends I was too fat. And I have since lost 26 lbs, and you can imagine that in bags of sugar and I am going to continue that diet, because you've got to search for the hero inside yourself in the hope that that individual is considerably slimmer, and when you look at the general economic condition of this country when we went into lockdown there was a similarity because we were on the face of it in pretty good shape.

We had a record number of people in jobs. We had record low unemployment. We were seeing growing exports; and the only reason as Rishi Sunak pointed out in the last few months that we have been able to cope with the cost of the pandemic – to look after jobs and livelihoods in the way that we have – is that in the previous years we had sensible conservative management of the public finances.

And yet if you looked more carefully you could see – and indeed many of us said so at the time – that the UK economy had some chronic underlying problems: long-term failure to tackle the deficit in skills, inadequate transport infrastructure, not enough homes people could afford to buy, especially young people – and far too many people, across the whole country, who felt ignored and left out, that the government was not on their side; and so we cannot now define the mission of this country as merely to restore normality.

That isn't good enough.

In the depths of the second world war, in 1942 when just about everything had gone wrong, the government sketched out a vision of the post war new Jerusalem that they wanted to build. And that is what we are doing now – in the teeth of this pandemic.

We need to move fast, not just to deal with the immediate economic fall out, but because after 12 years of relative anaemia we need to lift the trend rate of growth. We need to lift people's incomes, not just go back to where we were.

And it is clear from Covid that we need the economic robustness to deal with whatever the next cosmic spanner may be hurtling towards us in the dark; and the only way to ensure true resilience and long term prosperity is to raise the overall productivity of the country – and the bedrock of national productivity is of course something that we are responsible for, having great public services on which everyone – families, business, investors – can rely.

That means first a great health service; and so it is right that this government is pressing on with its plan for 48 hospitals. Count them. That's the eight already underway, and then 40 more between now and 2030.

We need to get on with recruiting the 50,000 more nurses – and I am proud that we have 14,000 more since this government came into office; 14,000 more nurses now, under this Conservative government in the last year – and yet that isn't enough.

We have seen the frantic global scrabble for vaccines, for therapies – and so now we are doubling our funding for all types of revolutionary scientific breakthroughs, with a national Advanced Research and Projects Agency; and while we are at it we will do what all governments have shirked for decades.

We will fix the injustice of care home funding, bringing the magic of averages to the rescue of millions.

Covid has shone a spotlight on the difficulties of that sector in all parts of the UK – and to build back better we must respond, care for the carers as they care for us.

And if we are to raise productivity and encourage investment in the UK, then there is one thing we must do as a matter of basic hygiene; and that is to fight crime.

And so yes, we are fulfilling our manifesto commitment to put another 20,000 officers out on the street – and I am proud that we have already recruited almost 5000. But fan though I am of the police, we need to see results, not just spending; and so we are also backing those police, and protecting the public, by changing the law to stop the early release of serious sexual and violent offenders, and stopping the whole criminal justice system from being hamstrung by what the Home Secretary would doubtless and rightly call the lefty human rights lawyers and other do-gooders.

And in spite of the pandemic the Home Secretary and I are having regular CompStat style sessions with the chief constables, when we look at the crime data across the country, and compare performance, and work out what we can do to help.

Town by town we are rooting out the county lines drugs gangs that are causing so much misery – and in that sense our agenda is basic social justice.

When I talk about levelling up, I mean making the streets safer for everyone; and when I talk about levelling up, I mean not just investing massively in our schools, delivering on our promise to raise per pupil funding to £4000 per head in primary school and £5000 per head in secondary school, as well as a £30k starting salary for teachers.

I am thinking not just about the inputs, but about the outputs – the changes in the lives of young people. And so I want to take further an idea that we have tried in the pandemic, and explore the value of one-to-one teaching, both for pupils who are in danger of falling behind, and for those who are of exceptional abilities.

We can all see the difficulties, but I believe such intensive teaching could be transformational, and of massive reassurance to parents.

It is in a crisis like this that new approaches are born, and last week grasped a nettle that has intimidated governments for the last century – we effectively broke down the senseless barrier between Further Education and Higher Education, so that it is just as easy to get the funding you need for a training course in engineering or IT as for a degree in politics or economics; because we are offering every adult four years of funded post-18 education – a lifetime skills guarantee. A lifetime skills guarantee.

From internet shopping to working from home, it looks as though Covid has massively accelerated changes in the world of work; and as old jobs are lost and as new jobs are created we are offering free training for adults without A-levels in vital skills from adult care to wind turbine maintenance.

The Covid crisis is a catalyst for change, and we need to give people the chance to train for the new jobs that are being created every day.

And there is one area where we are progressing with gale force speed; and that is the green economy, the green industrial revolution that in the next ten years will create hundreds of thousands if not millions of jobs.

I can today announce that the UK government has decided to become the world leader in low cost clean power generation – cheaper than coal, cheaper than gas; and we believe that in ten years time offshore wind will be powering every home in the country, with our target rising from 30 gigawatts to 40 gigawatts.

You heard me right. Your kettle, your washing machine, your cooker, your heating, your plug-in electric vehicle – the whole lot of them will get their juice cleanly and without guilt from the breezes that blow around these islands.

We will invest £160m in ports and factories across the country, to manufacture the next generation of turbines.

And we will not only build fixed arrays in the sea; we will build windmills that float on the sea – enough to deliver one gigawatt of energy by 2030, 15 times floating windmills, fifteen times as much as the rest of the world put together.

Far out in the deepest waters we will harvest the gusts, and by upgrading infrastructure in such places as Teesside and Humber and Scotland and Wales we will increase an offshore wind capacity that is already the biggest in the world.

As Saudi Arabia is to oil, the UK is to wind – a place of almost limitless resource, but in the case of wind without the carbon emissions, without the damage to the environment.

I remember how some people used to sneer at wind power, twenty years ago, and say that it wouldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding.

They forgot the history of this country. It was offshore wind that puffed the sails of Drake and Raleigh and Nelson, and propelled this country to commercial greatness.

This investment in offshore wind alone will help to create 60,000 jobs in this country – and help us to get to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Imagine that future – with high-skilled, green-collar jobs in wind, in solar, in nuclear, in hydrogen and in carbon capture and storage. Retrofitting homes, ground source heat pumps.

Mother nature has savaged us with Covid, but with the help of basic natural phenomena we will build back and bounce back greener; and this government will lead that green industrial revolution.

We will create the conditions for individuals and for companies to flourish, with a high-skilled low-crime economy, and if there was a physical audience in front of me now I would solicit cheers by shouting out the details of our revolution in transport infrastructure – the A roads we are going to upgrade, the rail lines we are building or electrifying, the simple ways in which we will improve your lives, your daily commute.

But we must be clear that there comes a moment when the state must stand back and let the private sector get on with it.

I have a simple message for those on the left, who think everything can be funded by uncle sugar the taxpayer.

It isn't the state that produces the new drugs and therapies we are using. It isn't the state that will hold the intellectual property of the vaccine, if and when we get one. It wasn't the state that made the gloves and masks and ventilators that we needed at such speed.

It was the private sector, with its rational interest in innovation and competition and market share and, yes, sales.

We must not draw the wrong economic conclusion from this crisis.

Rishi Sunak the Chancellor has come up with some brilliant expedients to help business to protect jobs and livelihoods; but let's face it, he has done things that no Conservative chancellor would have wanted to do except in times of war or disaster.

This government has been forced by the pandemic into erosions of liberty that we deeply regret, and to an expansion of the role of the state – from lockdown enforcement to the many bail-outs and subsidies – that go against our instincts, but we accept them because there is simply no reasonable alternative.

And yet on the left, in the Labour party, there are many who regard this state expansion as progress, who want to keep the state supporting furlough forever, keep people in suspended animation, and who want to keep the state pre-empting and spending almost half our national income.

We Conservatives believe that way lies disaster, and that we must build back better by becoming more competitive, both in tax and regulation.

We need to make this the best place to start a business, the best place to invest, and we need to unleash the urge not just to build but to own.

We need to fix our broken housing market.

When Covid struck there were millions of people, often young people, who found themselves locked down in rented accommodation, without private space, without a garden, forced to use ironing boards for desks and bedrooms for offices.

I know that many people are of course happy with renting and the flexibility that it offers. But for most people it is still true that the overwhelming instinct is to buy.

Many of them simply can't – not because they can't afford the mortgage, but because they can't afford the deposit, and the disgraceful truth is that levels of owner occupation for the under forties have plummeted in this country, and millions of people are forced to pay through the nose to rent a home they cannot truly love or make their own, because they cannot add a knob or a knocker to the front door or in some cases even hang a picture – let alone pass it on to their children.

Yes, we will transform the sclerotic planning system. We will make it faster and easier to build beautiful new homes without destroying the green belt or desecrating the countryside.

But these reforms will take time, and they are not enough on their own.

We need now to take forward one of the key proposals of our manifesto of 2019 – giving young first time buyers the chance to take out a long-term fixed rate mortgage of up to 95 per cent of the value of the home, vastly reducing the size of the deposit, and giving the chance of home ownership – and all the joy and pride that goes with it – to millions that feel excluded.

We believe that this policy could create two million more owner occupiers, the biggest expansion of home ownership since the 1980s.

We will help turn generation rent into generation buy. We will fix the long-term problems of this country not by endlessly expanding the state, but by giving power back to people – the fundamental life-affirming power of home ownership, the power to decide what colour to paint your own front door.

With our long-term fixed rate mortgages we want to spread that opportunity to every part of the country; and that is the difference between us Conservatives and the Labour opposition.

They may have million pound homes in North London, but they deeply dislike home ownership for anyone else.

We want to level up – they want to level down.

We are proud of this country's culture and history and traditions; they literally want to pull statues down, to re-write the history of our country, to edit our national CV to make it look more politically correct.

We aren't embarrassed to sing old songs about how Britannia rules the waves – in fact, we are even making sense of it with a concerted national ship-building strategy that will bring jobs to every part of the UK, especially in Scotland, and we believe passionately in our wonderful Union, our United Kingdom – while the Labour opposition who have done frankly nothing to defend the Union, and continue to flirt with those who would tear our country apart.

And I say frankly to those separatist Scottish nationalists who would like this country to be distracted and divided by yet more constitutional wrangling, now is the time to pull together and build back better in every part of the United Kingdom.

We believe in Global Britain as a proud independent and outward-looking country, and next year we will lead the world in the G7, and at the cop 26 summit in Glasgow, with three great campaigns to bring the world together – to heal the world, tackling the virus, tackling climate change, and global free trade.

We have the confidence in our values and diplomacy – and be in no doubt that they are secretly scheming to overturn brexit and take us back into the EU.

We believe in our fantastic armed services as one of the greatest exports this country has.

They, the Labour party can't even vote for measures to protect veterans from vexatious prosecutions, fifty years later, when no new evidence is supplied.

And throughout this pandemic it is this government that has taken the tough decisions, because we believe that there are no easy answers, while they have simply sniped from the side-lines.

Well, my friends, we have no time now to focus on Captain Hindsight and his regiment of pot-shot, snipeshot fusiliers.

I want to raise your eyes, and I want you to imagine that you are arriving in Britain in 2030, when I hope that much of the programme I have outlined will be delivered, and you arrive in your zero carbon jet made in the UK and you flash your Brexit blue passport or your digital ID, you get an ev digital taxi; and as you travel around you see a country that has been and is being transformed for the better – where young people in their 20s and 30s have the joy of home ownership, and where they can bring up their children in the neighbourhoods where they grew up themselves, in the confidence that the schools are excellent and that crime is down; and instead of being dragged on big commutes to the city, they can start a business in their home town, a place that has not only superb transport connections and green buses, but gigabit broadband, and where the workforce is abundantly equipped not just with university degrees but with the technical skills that the new economy demands.

And among other new landmarks you will see 48 new hospitals, and a population that is healthier and happier and quite a bit thinner from better diet, and taking so much exercise in the new cycle lanes, and walking among the millions of trees that have been planted, and going for picnics in the new wild belts that now mark the landscape.

You will notice that the air is cleaner because most people are now driving EVs, while some of the trucks are actually running on hydrogen, and even some of the trains.

And I believe you will see a Britain that is more united than for decades in its constitutional settlement, where Brexit has delivered a new excitement and verve – not just free trade and free ports, but control over our fisheries, and the ability to do things differently and better, from innovation in tech and data and finance to improving our standards of our animal welfare.

Yes, you will see a country that scrupulously controls its own borders, but which is in some ways more cosmopolitan than ever before, welcoming scientists and artists and people of talent from around the world, a Britain that is proud of our culture and history and unashamed of our heritage, but also unblinkered about the present – embracing every person with love and respect whatever their race or creed or gender or orientation.

That is the Britain we can build – in its way, and with all due respect to everywhere else, the greatest place on earth; indeed that is the country and the society we are in the process of building.

And I know that it seems tough now, when we are tackling the indignities and cruelty and absurdity of the disease, but I believe it is a measure of the greatness of this country that we are simply not going to let it hold us back or slow us down, and we are certainly not going to let it get us down, not for a moment, because even in the darkest moments we can

see the bright future ahead, and we can see how to build it, and we are going to build it together.