

## **Maiden Speech of Brandon Lewis MP for Great Yarmouth**

*Obtained from House of Commons Hansard*

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) and all the hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today. So excellent have they been that there is great pressure on those who rise to speak at this stage of the day, because we are very aware of what has come before.

I am also conscious of Great Yarmouth's history, and it seems, in an ironic way, fitting that I should make my maiden speech in a debate on Europe, given some of the political controversy that Great Yarmouth has enjoyed over the years. That dates back to the fact that some Members of Parliament of the time signed the death warrant for King Charles I in Great Yarmouth—I commend the museum there to any hon. Member who wishes to find out more about that—and carried on through to its dissolution as a constituency in the mid-1900s for electoral questions and corruption, only for the constituency subsequently to rise again.

I am the third Member of Parliament to represent Great Yarmouth in its new formation. The first was Michael Carttiss, which is why I mentioned the irony of the fact that I am speaking in a European debate. Michael's views, actions and speeches on Europe and on the Maastricht treaty are still notorious in Great Yarmouth and Norfolk, as they doubtless are with some hon. Members. He gave years of public service and still serves as a Norfolk county councillor in the Great Yarmouth area. He was followed by my direct predecessor, Mr Anthony Wright, who has also given a huge amount of public service and who deserves a great deal of thanks from me and from all the constituents of Great Yarmouth. We should recognise the amount of time that he put in as a councillor and council leader, and as the Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth. He built a great reputation among all its residents for being a genuine, straight and friendly man to deal with, and he did so much to represent many charities across the constituency.

There are a great many things to do in my constituency, and it is fitting that I am speaking on a day when so many hon. Members representing seaside and coastal resorts have spoken. There has been a form of competition as to who represents the best coastal town, and I shall put my pitch in for Great Yarmouth, the second largest seaside town in the country. Tourism is a hugely important industry for my area, as it is worth getting on for £500 million a year to its economy. That makes it important to Great Yarmouth, to Norfolk and to East Anglia. Our area contains more than most people realise. It contains a large chunk of the Norfolk broads, rural villages to enjoy, architecture that dates back to the ruins of Roman forts, places with links to Nelson, some fabulous museums, a race track, a dog track and a wonderful shoreline.

However, part of that shoreline is under threat from coastal erosion. Our coast stretches from Winterton, through Hemsby, Scratby, Great Yarmouth itself, Gorleston and Hopton. I will have work to do as a Member of Parliament to support the new Government on this issue, when, as I hope, we move away from the bureaucracy and red tape that has led to report after report on coastal erosion, and get down to doing some work to protect our coastline and safeguard some of the communities in Great Yarmouth. I will work with my hon. Friend and ally the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) to make sure that we protect the coastline to the east of Norfolk more generally.

We must also remember that tourism is an important industry for our country. I hope to play my part in arguing the case for it, as it is one of our most cost-effective industries in creating jobs. That is something that we in Great Yarmouth need, as at certain times of the year our unemployment is way above average.

The town has one of the most deprived wards in the country, and there is much work to do to improve our infrastructure. One of my predecessors often joked that the nearest motorway was on mainland Europe, and not too much has changed. We have work to do in that regard, but it is worth doing. Earlier, I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mention the green agenda, climate change and the need for new energy sources in the future, because all that represents an opportunity for Great Yarmouth. Just as the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) noted with regard to her constituency, Great Yarmouth can benefit from renewable energy. I believe that I can work with my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) to make Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth an epicentre for renewable energy in our region, as well as in our country and in Europe. We in Great Yarmouth already have the experience of working with the offshore oil and gas industries, and the offshore wind farm at Scroby Sands used to be the largest in Europe.

A new wind farm is coming, and there is the local potential to exploit marine energy and other renewables because we have the necessary experience and expertise. Most importantly, our phenomenal new outer harbour has created a deep-water port that will allow us to service the industry, not just through facilitating its supply chain when it is built, but by acting as its construction base. I intend to play my part, loudly, in bringing that about. I have already talked to Ministers to ensure that Great Yarmouth gets a really good shot at delivering on some of the opportunities arising from the new energy industry. I want to protect and grow our economy, and to protect and grow energy for our country in the future.

We have a wide diversity of business in Great Yarmouth. The Government's plans to free up business and entrepreneurs are very exciting. The tourism industry is the essence of our entrepreneurship, but among our businesses are also companies that supply potatoes for crisps and chips. Other firms supply microchips for NASA and the Ministry of Defence, and still others provide broadband services and other facilities.

Mine is a diverse and exciting constituency. I have a phenomenal job ahead of me in making sure that I deliver on the trust and faith that the people of Great Yarmouth have placed in me. I want to follow those that have gone before in making sure that we take advantage of the opportunities that exist for the area. I intend to play my part in making sure that we grip with them with both hands. I hope that I can play a small part in moving Great Yarmouth forward, thereby helping our country to grow in the years ahead.