For many years conservationists have implored governments to produce a long-term strategy for safeguarding the environment. Michael Gove has now declared that Britain’s air, water, wildlife and countryside will be better tended after Brexit than before. The goal is admirable and vital. The prime minister rightly rejects the idea that policymakers have to choose between the environment and the economy. The experience of advanced countries since the war has been that, with sensible laws in place, prosperity and good environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. Mrs May also insists that “conservation and conservation are natural allies.” This should be true, but saying it does not make it so.

The new plan for the environment makes sense politically for a party that must win over young voters who consider themselves green with a small “g.” It incorporates good thinking, especially on the need to rid both the economy and the environment of the scourge of throwaway plastic. But it does not go far enough. This is the standard refrain of environmental lobby groups whenever ministers set out to save the natural world, but it is unfortunately applicable.

The government’s headline aim is to eliminate “avoidable” plastic waste within a quarter of a century. It has many proposals on how to achieve this but only one effective step — to extend the existing 5p charge for single-use plastic bags from supermarkets to corner shops. The context, as Dame Ellen MacArthur has explained, is a consumer economy in which just 2 per cent of plastics are fully recycled, 72 per cent end up in landfill or the sea, and a third of all fish have ingested plastic. In these circumstances a plan based on aspiration rather than action is unlikely to succeed even with all Mr Gove’s energy behind it. Preserving Britain’s green and pleasant land, not to mention its coastal waters and the oceans beyond, is the task of individuals, charities and companies as well as government. Behaviour must change. Consumers used to blemish-free bananas will have to tolerate more bruises and commit to more careful recycling. Manufacturers will have to accept responsibility for the full life-cycles of their products and expect customers to vote with their wallets if they fall short. But ministers make the rules and set the timetable, and Mr Gove’s should be tighter and tougher.

There is little in his plan for the next 25 years that could not be accomplished in ten. He should be more willing to require the private sector to act, rather than simply encouraging it. His plan is a respectable first draft, but a second will be needed. Obvious interest in the matter of the plastic bag — insufficiently driven by speech, Mrs May said that her government would “explore” the idea of plastic-free aisles in supermarkets. It should insist on them. She said that it would “consult” on deposit schemes to increase the return and re-use of plastic bottles. It should mandate them. She said that it would “consider” a surcharge on single-use takeaway coffee cups. The consideration has gone on long enough. The case for such a charge has grown ever stronger since charging for plastic bags has caused their use to plummet. Now is the time for action.

The government should commit to expanding Britain’s marine preserves and to policing them properly. It should bring forward the deadlines for phasing out petrol and diesel engines, and it should expand high-tech anaerobic waste incineration capacity to compensate for China’s decision to stop importing plastics. Conservative commitments to the environment have too often unraveled. The government is right to put the issue at the heart of its post-Brexit vision, but voters will not quickly forget broken promises, and the countryside and seas will not easily recover.

Trumping Tehran

Iran believes it can carry on spreading mayhem by pitting Europe against the US

Peers had a chance on Wednesday night to show their understanding of the competing demands of privacy and unfettered public interest journalism. With drastic cuts to the BBC’s grant in aid and the BBC Trust’s recommendation to slash the vote was a narrow defeat for the government. Mrs May also insists that “conservation and conservation are natural allies.” This should be true, but saying it does not make it so.

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The Press Imperilled

Amendments to the Data Protection Bill are a threat to journalistic freedom

week as saying: “In case the Americans exit the deal, we will react in no time flat.” By which he meant Tehran will not immediately and instantaneously international inspections teams to sensitive sites. An Iranian exit from the agreement would trigger a race for a bomb with Saudi Arabia.

The best course is therefore to compartmentalise policies towards Iran. The deal could be improved without ripping it up entirely, and diplomatic pressure should be applied on the regime to accept tougher verification procedures. Iran’s desperation for continuing sanctions relief may outweigh its reluctance to lose face. In parallel, there must be stiffer non-nuclear sanctions for its sponsorship of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. These should be targeted towards Revolutionary Guard commanders and those identified as responsible for the recent crackdown.

The protesters on Iran’s streets complain that sanctions money is being diverted from the civilian economy into sinister military operations. They want to live in a society that does not define itself through violence. That is a justified demand and the West is right to support it.