

Good morning.

Thank you Chuka and thank you everyone for joining me here today here – and it is a very happy day for our party.

I am over the moon to be welcoming Sarah to the Liberal Democrats.

The second woman MP to join our benches since I was elected as leader just a few weeks ago.

And I feel so proud of our members for the warm welcome that they have already given to Sarah Wollaston.

And In particular, I am grateful to the Caroline Voaden MEP and the Totnes local party for the spirit in which they approached this.

Sarah is a formidable MP, and I am so glad to have her by my side in our fight to stop Brexit.

I want to be very clear this morning.

I am determined to do whatever it takes to stop Brexit, and the Liberal Democrats will continue to lead the Remain cause, as the strongest, and most consistent party arguing that our best future is in the European Union.

In just eleven weeks, however, our country faces an immediate crisis: crashing out of the EU without any deal. The most cavalier and catastrophic of Brexits: putting at risk hundreds of thousands of jobs, public services including our NHS, and even our national security.

So in this moment of national emergency, I stand ready to work with anyone to stop Boris Johnson and his hard-line Brexit government.

Despite saying that No Deal was a million to one chance, that is clearly the destination Boris Johnson is headed towards.

He was prepared to say anything in his selfish quest to become Prime Minister at all costs. And there will be costs.

Because let's be frank – a no deal Brexit is an utterly irresponsible pursuit.

No decent public servant should even contemplate risking that level of damage to our country.

A no deal Brexit will be a bad deal for our public services and our economy.

So bad that we'll have to stockpile medicines, accept food shortages, and spend taxpayers' money bailing out otherwise healthy businesses.

A no deal Brexit is a bad for our family of nations.

On Monday, I travelled to the border in Northern Ireland and I listened to people telling me what life was like before the Good Friday Agreement.

Incidentally it's something that Boris Johnson hasn't bothered to do – either as Prime Minister or in his two years as Foreign Secretary.

People there are worried. They know that even if there were some as-yet un-invented magic technological solution, there would still need to be cameras, or checking facilities, at the border or nearby.

And they told me that they can see how it will escalate. The border technology would become a target, and would itself need security and protection, and before long you're back in the realms of a divisive border, separating communities, marking people out as different depending on their passport or address.

I met Doire, a wonderful young woman spearheading Our Future Our Choice Northern Ireland. She told me about how when her older sister used to go to school they had to have their schoolbags checked at the checkpoint on their way.

A local businessman, Conor, told me about when he was detained at the checkpoint for an hour and a half with his wife and baby, for no reason other than his age, gender and the part of town he lived in.

That was the reality, that's why there is so much fear in Northern Ireland. People do not want to go back to how things were.

That open border is important in practical terms for trade and the everyday comings and goings of people whose lives are intertwined across that line on the map. And it is emotionally resonant too – that open border represents the openness between those communities, and freedom itself.

A no deal Brexit is a bad deal for our NHS.

Early this year, a local doctor came to my advice surgery because he was worried about the impact on the supply of time-sensitive radiopharmaceuticals. He explained to me how the Government's own No Deal plans as a result of border delays would mean technetium and krypton arriving at Glasgow hospitals hours late, meaning fewer treatments.

Cancer patients waiting longer for scans and treatment. In the UK. In 2019. As a result of a political choice by the Government.

A no deal Brexit is a bad deal for rural Britain.

Just two weeks ago, I was in Wales, celebrating the election of Jane Dodds.

The people of Brecon and Radnorshire finally have an MP who understands their worries about a no deal Brexit.

Who has listened to sheep farmers concerned that they will have to resort to mass slaughter of their livestock if we crash out without a deal.

A no deal Brexit is bad for our environment

Just yesterday I visited Green Port Hull, which is transforming the city and the wider East Yorkshire area into a world-class centre for renewable energy.

The UK is leading the world in offshore wind generation, cutting carbon and providing jobs.

And the climate emergency is the biggest fundamental threat we face. Our best chance to stop irreversible damage to our planet is by working with our closest allies in Europe, not turning our backs.

Boris Johnson is playing at being Prime Minister.

He is playing with fire.

Playing with our jobs, our climate, our wellbeing, our security.

Just what will he say to the father who has just lost his job because of the No Deal Brexit?

Telling him to cheer up in Latin just won't wash.

Boris Johnson, stop playing with our country's future.

Theresa May's repeated call that 'no deal is better than a bad deal' formed the blueprint for the dangerous idea that no-deal was even an option.

Now Boris Johnson has taken that blueprint and committed the entire machinery of Government to delivering it, regardless of the consequences.

Regardless of the fact that he hasn't got a mandate for it.

Even Michael Gove, who is now in charge of no deal preparations, admitted it – earlier this year he said:

"We didn't vote to leave without a deal. That wasn't the message of the campaign I helped lead."

And they didn't get a mandate for it at the 2017 General Election either.

Not that I get much joy from reading the 2017 Conservative Manifesto but it clearly said that a Conservative government would:

"...secure a smooth, orderly Brexit..." and a promise to "secure the best possible deal".

In July, in the House of Commons, while Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said "There is no plan for no deal because we are going to get a great deal."

No plan, no mandate, no clue.

There is no majority in the country for crashing out of the European Union without a deal. And there is no majority in Parliament either.

Let me be clear.

We are running out of time - but this no deal Brexit crisis can and must be stopped.

When Parliament returns, if MPs choose, we can pass a law to stop us crashing out of the EU on 31st of October.

This is the time for MPs to stand and be counted. Just saying “No to No Deal”, is not enough.

As well as willing the end, MPs must be prepared to will the means.

That means agreeing a tangible route to prevent No Deal, and how to guarantee it.

I believe the best way to prevent No Deal, is to request an extension of Article 50 for the purpose of holding a People’s Vote, so the public can have the final say on the Brexit deal.

A People’s Vote already has significant support in the House of Commons, with 280 MPs voting for it in March.

It will provide a clear resolution to the Brexit issue within a matter of weeks. Either we would have confidence that there was genuinely majority support in the country for proceeding with a particular Brexit – which at the moment we do not have – or we would have made a clear choice to stay in the European Union, as I obviously hope would be the case.

Other MPs might make the case for alternative ways to prevent No Deal, though the options are limited.

The key thing, and a hugely positive thing, is that MPs from different parties are working together over the summer to determine the best way forward to avoid a No Deal catastrophe.

We will need to be resolute, too, in how we guarantee this.

Boris Johnson, and those around him, have made clear they are prepared to rip up convention and traditional rules to impose their will. Whether it’s threatening to shut down our democratic institutions, or fixing the date of the next election, nothing seems off limits. Could we even be sure that Boris Johnson would comply with any law passed by Parliament to stop No Deal?

To be certain, we need to have the option of removing the Prime Minister.

That means winning a vote of no confidence against Boris Johnson, and within 14 days installing an emergency Government with an alternative Prime Minister who has the confidence of the House and will stop a No Deal Brexit.

That vote of no confidence would have to be triggered by Jeremy Corbyn – because as Leader of the Opposition, he is the only one with the power to do it.

Yesterday he wrote to me and other party leaders to say he would table a vote of no confidence to form a time-limited government to call a General Election, with him as Prime Minister.

In my first week as Leader of the Liberal Democrats, I called on Jeremy Corbyn to table a vote of no confidence in the government.

And I asked him to table it before summer recess, because that was the only way to be sure we could hold an election before crashing out on 31st of October.

Time and time again, Jeremy Corbyn has let the Government off the hook on Brexit.

On thirty-one key Brexit votes, he has either asked his MPs to sit on their hands or marched them through the voting lobby side by side with the Government.

And now instead of doing everything in his power to stop us from crashing out, he's demanding the keys to Number 10 as a pre-condition for a vote of no confidence.

We are facing a national crisis. We may need an emergency government to resolve it. But if Jeremy Corbyn truly wants that to succeed, surely even he can see that he cannot lead it.

There is no way he can unite rebel Conservatives and independents to stop Boris Johnson. It's not even certain he would secure the votes of Labour MPs.

This isn't about personalities, this is about a plan that actually works.

What we need in a leader of an emergency government is a long-serving Member of Parliament who is respected on both sides of the House.

Someone like Ken Clarke or Harriet Harman, the Father and Mother of the House.

They are hugely experienced. And unlike Jeremy Corbyn, or indeed myself, they're not seeking to lead a government in the long term.

Over the last few months, I have been clear that there is no limit to my ambition for the Liberal Democrats.

Our party is winning again.

We've had our best-ever local elections.

Our best-ever European elections.

New MPs in Chuka Umunna, Jane Dodds, and Sarah Wollaston.

But the stakes are too high right now. We are facing a national crisis on a scale we haven't seen in generations.

This isn't the time for personal agendas and political games. This is the time for grown-up politics. This is the time for real leadership.

So when Parliament returns in September, I call on all MPs who want to stop a no deal Brexit to put our ambitions and differences aside, work together and *actually* stop it. We can do this.

And I do want to be clear where the Liberal Democrats stand. As a party, we don't just want to stop a no deal Brexit.

Because there is no form of Brexit that will be good for our country.

The best deal we could get is the one we already have, as members of the European Union.

We believe that future generations should enjoy the same opportunities that we did – to live, work and fall in love in 27 other countries.

We believe that in the face of terrorism and the climate emergency, we must work with our closest allies, not shun them.

We believe that our best chance to build a richer, greener and safer future is if we stay together as a strong U.K family of nations in the European Union.

And my message to those out there who agree with us is simple.

There is a battle going on for the future of our country and I want you by my side.

Chuka, Sarah and thirty thousand members have already joined the Liberal Democrats in the last three months alone.

Our door is open.

Come join us. Let's stop Brexit, and build a better future.

