

The Rt Honourable Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

9 December 2020

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing as national, regional and local leaders to ask you to act now to save our country from breaking up – and to address the wider loss of faith undermining our democracy.

The United Kingdom is in great danger. Recent polls show a clear trend towards Scots losing faith in the Union, and a majority of Britons believe the UK is heading for break-up. That should be a clamorous wake-up call for us to examine the status quo. The Union in your care is important and precious, and we need you to protect it.

Our country is a diverse, proud, and occasionally fractious partnership, with deep bonds of history, culture, and solidarity. Its value comes from the heart, not just the head. It is not just an arrangement with huge practical benefits, but a close tie of affection, regard, and mutual support, a shared identity which can complement our other national and regional identities, rather than compete with them. Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have achieved great things together, and we still can.

Yet the disillusionment in Scotland is only the most visible expression of a much wider crisis. Three quarters of people in the UK believe our political system is not fit for purpose, amid a powerful desire to take back control. There is pervasive pessimism about our national unity and our national decline. In COVID we faced a common danger, against which local communities performed heroically, and we shared resources across the UK even as each nation was able to choose their own response. It might have been hoped to reinforce the ties between us, but just 23% of Britons believe the pandemic has brought us closer together.

We have seen the huge potential of devolution first hand, but also its weaknesses. Especially in England, it is constrained by a lack of adequate powers and funding: we need reform as much for England as for the devolved nations. Overall, we are still more centralised, and more regionally unequal, than any comparable country. The current relationship between our central government and the constituent parts of the UK is incoherent, often unjust, and ultimately unsustainable.

Across the country, alarm bells are ringing which we cannot ignore. The threat to the Union is the most urgent symptom of the wider illness, but it cannot be treated in isolation. If it is to last, any solution must look at our democracy as a whole.

We firmly believe that solution exists. The reaction both to the challenge in Scotland and to our wider crisis has too often been either complacency or resignation, but there are clear ways to address our divisions – if there is the will to act. We are a family of nations and regions: before nationalism tears that community apart, we need to sit down, as a family, to build a country we can all believe in.

For it to be credible and effective, that process must be thoughtful, rigorous, and insulated from partisan pressures; it must put ordinary people in the driving seat; and it must have a remit to generate real change. In practice, we suggest that means a deliberative, citizen-led constitutional assembly or convention.

We believe the aim should be a more federal Britain of Nations and Regions, a free and equal partnership with stronger devolution bringing power closer to the people, especially in England.

We are writing to you now because we are deeply concerned for the future of our country. We ask you, as Prime Minister, to meet this moment of danger in the spirit of national unity which it demands. We pledge to work in the same spirit.

The goal here transcends ordinary politics. We have the chance not just to preserve our Union, but to create the extraordinary legacy of a more harmonious, united and democratic Britain for us all. If we fail to answer the challenge, our legacy will instead be a loss that will be all the more bitter for being so unnecessary.

Time is fast running out. We can still save our country, but we need to act now.

Yours sincerely

Dan Jarvis MBE

Mayor of Sheffield City Region

CLlr Keith Aspden
City of York Council

CLlr Julian Bell
Ealing Council

CLlr Judith Blake CBE
Leeds City Council

CLlr Russ Bowden
Warrington Borough Council

CLlr Steve Brady OBE
Hull City Council

CLlr Allen Brett
Rochdale Borough Council

Gordon Brown

Andy Burnham
**Mayor of Greater Manchester
Combined Authority**

CLlr Muhammed Butt OBE
Brent Council

Sir Vince Cable

Rt. Hon. Menzies Campbell CBE
Lord Campbell of Pittenweem

CLlr David Mellen
Nottingham City Council

CLlr Sam Corcoran
Cheshire East Council

CLlr Steve Curran
Hounslow Council

CLlr Shaun Davies
**Telford and Wrekin Borough
Council**

CLlr Donald Davies
North Somerset Council

CLlr Ruth Dombey OBE
Sutton Council

Jamie Driscoll
**Mayor of North of Tyne
Combined Authority**

Tim Farron MP
Westmorland and Lonsdale

CLlr Nick Forbes CBE
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council

CLlr Louise Gittins
**Cheshire West and Chester
Council**

Cllr Georgia Gould
Camden Council

Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe
Bradford City Council

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Cllr David Molyneux
Wigan Borough Council

Norma Redfearn CBE
Mayor of North Tyneside

Cllr Dine Romero
Bath and North East Somerset Council

Cllr Jean Stretton
Oldham Borough Council

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Portsmouth City Council

Cllr Lynn Williams
Blackpool Council

Cllr Clare Coghill
Waltham Forest

Cllr Christopher Hammond
Southampton City Council

Sir Stephen Houghton CBE
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Helen Liddell
Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke

Cllr Shabir Pandor
Kirklees Borough Council

Cllr Gareth Roberts
Richmond upon Thames Council

Steve Rotherham
Mayor of Liverpool City Region

Cllr Tim Swift MBE
Calderdale Borough Council

Cllr Ian Ward
Birmingham City Council

Cllr Stewart Young
Cumbria County Council

Cllr Simon Henig CBE
Durham County Council

Cllr Denise Jeffery
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Cllr Peter Marland
Milton Keynes Council

Andy Preston
Middlesbrough Borough Council

Cllr Darren Rodwell
Barking and Dagenham

Cllr Heather Scott OBE
Darlington Borough Council

Cllr James C Swindlehurst
Slough Borough Council

Cllr Andrew Western
Trafford Borough Council

Cllr Caroline Kerr
Kingston upon Thames