The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

Cc: The Rt Hon Hamish Falconer MP
Minister for European Relations

By Email

20 November 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

UK-EU Summit: Nine Liberal Democrat Orange Lines

With today's UK–EU summit, we are writing as Liberal Democrat MPs to outline what we believe are critical steps for improvements to Britain's relationship with Europe and how we will judge the results of the summit over the following weeks.

We would far rather be discussing Britain's return to the Single Market and a bespoke UK–EU Customs Union. These would deliver the greatest economic benefits, removing barriers to trade, restoring opportunities and strengthening British businesses. Instead, Labour's self-imposed Brexit red lines have excluded both from the negotiating table.

The consequences of this limited ambition are already apparent. The failure to secure enhanced British participation in the EU's €150 billion SAFE defence programme has left our defence manufacturers disadvantaged, with that opportunity now effectively closed.

While agreements on food and agricultural trade, emissions trading and youth mobility may emerge today, their value must be judged by the barriers they actually remove, not simply the announcements made.

Against Labour's Brexit red lines, we therefore set out nine Liberal Democrat Orange Lines against which we will judge the summit's outcomes.

1. Restore meaningful opportunities for young people

The Youth Experience Scheme must offer genuinely reciprocal opportunities for young Britons to live, work, study and travel across Europe. We expect broad eligibility, meaningful duration, affordable costs and no arbitrary numerical caps. A restrictive or expensive scheme would be a poor substitute for the opportunities lost through Brexit. Young people deserve more than a token agreement.

2. Remove barriers facing Britain's musicians and creative industries

British musicians, performers and their crews should be able to tour Europe without prohibitive visa costs, work permits and administrative obstacles. We expect a comprehensive reciprocal agreement covering performers, equipment and cross-border touring. After years of disruption to our creative industries, further expressions of goodwill will not suffice.

3. Restore opportunities for professionals and financial services

From architects and engineers to lawyers, consultants and financial services professionals, British expertise must be able to compete across European markets. We expect progress on mutual recognition of professional qualifications, business mobility and financial services cooperation. The City of London and our wider professional services sector cannot remain an afterthought.

4. Remove barriers confronting British importers and exporters

An SPS agreement may reduce costs for food and agricultural businesses, but it leaves wider customs formalities, regulatory duplication and paperwork largely untouched. We expect meaningful reductions in trading costs across the economy, not the presentation of limited sectoral agreements as comprehensive solutions. The refusal to negotiate a Customs Union and Single Market membership continues to leave the greatest opportunities unrealised.

5. Prevent new electric vehicle tariffs from 1 January 2027

Stricter rules of origin could expose non-compliant British electric vehicle exports to 10% tariffs within weeks. Manufacturers and their supply chains urgently need certainty. We expect an agreement preserving tariff-free trade, including a workable postponement where necessary. A further promise to continue negotiations would be wholly inadequate.

6. Secure protections for British industry under 'Made in Europe'

The EU's emerging Made in Europe arrangements risk disadvantaging British manufacturers, particularly within our deeply integrated automotive supply chains. The Government has confirmed this issue will be raised on Friday, but raising it is not resolving it. We expect clear assurances that Britain will be treated as a trusted European industrial partner, with credible protections for British manufacturers. The industry and its workforce need certainty, not prolonged negotiations.

7. Join the EU Migration and Asylum Pact

As our colleague Max Wilkinson MP has argued, effective and humane management of irregular migration requires closer European cooperation. We expect the Government to pursue participation in the EU Migration and Asylum Pact, including Eurodac access and reciprocal arrangements for determining responsibility for asylum claims and facilitating appropriate returns. Isolated bilateral agreements cannot substitute for a coherent European framework.

8. Strengthen European energy, climate and regulatory cooperation

Linking emissions trading systems is a useful step, but we expect progress towards joining the European Internal Electricity Market and renewed cooperation with European regulatory agencies covering chemicals, aviation and medicines. These arrangements matter for energy bills, investment and competitiveness. We want clear commitments and timetables, not further declarations of intent.

9. Put Britain at the heart of European defence and security

The failure to secure enhanced participation in SAFE has already demonstrated the costs of insufficient ambition. With that opportunity effectively closed, Britain must not miss the next. We expect concrete progress on future European defence financing and procurement, closer cooperation with the European Defence Agency and participation in PESCO projects. Britain's defence industries and European security cannot afford further missed opportunities.

We recognise that not every objective can be secured at a single summit. But that cannot become a standing excuse for limited agreements and opportunities continually deferred.

For the Liberal Democrats, rebuilding Britain's relationship with Europe is about the young person denied opportunities abroad, the musician priced out of a European tour, the exporter buried in paperwork and the automotive worker facing uncertainty about their livelihood.

We will judge the summit against these nine Orange Lines: what has actually been agreed, when it will take effect and which barriers remain. We would welcome your response on how the Government intends to deliver against each objective, including those left unresolved.

Britain needs a European relationship defined by the opportunities we can create, not the barriers the Government refuses to remove.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Al Pinkerton MP
Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Europe

Sir Ed Davey MP
Gideon Amos MP
Steffan Aquarone MP
Josh Babarinde MP
Alison Bennett MP
Alex Brewer MP
Jess Brown-Fuller MP
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David Chadwick MP
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Chris Coghlan MP
Victoria Collins MP
Daisy Cooper MP
Adam Dance MP
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Richard Foord MP
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